Don't Take that Sinner from Me

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Don't Take that Sinner from Me

by emmawalters

Summary

Persephone thought she was cunning, tricking the King of the Underworld to marry her so she could escape her mother's controlling personality. But the world has always been more complicated than she could anticipate, and 100 years later, she strikes a deal with her mother: If she, after 5,000 years of separation, still loves Hades the same, with the same intensity and depth, she never has to return home for the summer.

But Persephone has skills on her side, and when Jack Crawford needs Will Graham's help, he strikes a deal to get his husband back. If only people would stop finding cruel ways to kill each other, so that Will could actually spend time with Hannibal.

Notes

I started this story in 2015, and I had a vision for it. But that was 20-year-old me who knew far less about writing and hadn't yet figured out what she was going to do with her life. I'm still kind of in the same boat, but I've never stopped thinking about this story, so I deleted the previous one to write it anew. Most of the plot lines have been changed, at this point, so if you've read the old one, don't worry.

I don't know when updates will be. At least once a month, but I'm hoping for every two weeks. Once a month is something concrete I can promise, though. I'll be posting about progress on my twitter, @waterstowhine, under which I've decided to use the hashtag #dttsfm, because no one else is using it.

Don't Care if He's Guilty (Don't Care if He's Not)

His alarms blaring mixes with the sound of eight dogs barking to create an annoying symphony, Will rubs the sleep out of his eyes and looks down at the troublemakers he's allowed into his home. Most of them are up and ready to go, jumping around and making their way to the door. Buster seems to have slept through all the noise, though, so Will reaches down to scratch him behind the ears before forcing his way through the sea of dogs at his feet, opening the front door and setting them free.

The air has a chill in it, Will decides as he stands on the porch for a second, watching Buster make his way slowly down the front steps and into the yard with everyone else. Soon it'll be time to break out his winter coat, but for now one of his nicer jackets will work well enough. He closes the door, hobbling into the kitchen and opening the cabinets to grab at the coffee. A second to late, Will remembers that he ran out yesterday. He was supposed to stop at the store on the way home for more.

"Great," Will mutters to himself, instead heading upstairs and hoping a shower will wake him up.

Will likes Wolf Trap. He likes the way he's shaped his body, flat planes and hairy legs. Sometimes passing a shop window, a dress will catch his eye, and he'll walk inside to buy it, want to try it on before he remembers himself. The dress will still come home with him, of course, kept in the bottom drawer of his dresser. As he chooses his outfit of the day, Will doesn't touch that drawer, but he thinks about, just as he does every other morning. There's no reason he can't wear them. Realistically, men wear dresses.

But Will doesn't wear dresses, Persephone does, and to the rest of the world, Persephone doesn't exist. She's a myth, a piece of fiction molded into different narratives, completely void of autonomy. It isn't far removed from how his mother used to treat him, but given that she hadn't left him alone in the last 2,500 years, just to make sure he was cheating on their deal, Will has become exceptionally gifted at ignoring her words.

The memory of the day Persephone escaped her mother's house is clear, the passage of time affecting none of the color or shine. She can still feel the sun on her skin, how her long hair tangled in the breeze, how blood ran down her fingers, thorns still caught in them. Demeter tried to keep her inside, but no plants grown in front of doors could stop her desire for freedom.

For a long time she wandered, spent hours enjoying the knowledge that she could go anywhere, could do anything. She was a goddess, and no longer would her mother be allowed

to rule her life. Running through fields of flowers, she came across a river and washed herself clean, pulling out thorns and attempting to straighten her hair. It was there Hades found her.

His hair was long, curling down to his shoulders, and his robes were dark. Persephone knew who he was. She had never met him, but she could feel the darkness clinging to his body and wrapped around him like a magnificent robe. Wordlessly, he'd offered her a hand. Enchanted, she'd taken it, following him into the Underworld and across the Styx, past hundreds of floating souls and into a magnificent library. He'd handed her a pomegranate and told her that she could be free forever, if she only took a bite. Technically, she would belong to the Underworld, but he would let her go wherever, so long as she promised to come home to him.

As her mother entered, eyes wild with rage, Persephone wasn't given much time to make a choice. She'd taken a leap of faith, hoping it was the right choice, hoping Demeter wouldn't find some way to take this chance away from her. Shoving the seeds in her mouth, her eyes locked with Hades and she watched as his smile grew, still sincere and warm. In the screaming and arguing and the bargaining that followed, Persephone kept that smile close.

Even now, stepping out of the shower onto the cold, tile floor of his bathroom, Will can see the crinkles around Hades' mouth and the pleasure in his eyes. He wraps a towel around himself to keep out the chill of the day and dresses quickly as he can, checking in each mirror he passes to ensure his reminiscing hasn't caused him to shift into Persephone. How awkward it would be to show up to work in the wrong body. Alana and Jack would be the only ones left in the loop, as a parent always knows their child, regardless of form, and Demeter and Zeus had proved time and time again that simply changing his appearance would not keep them at bay.

"Everybody in," he calls to his pack as he stands on the porch, their bowls full of food and the heat set to a level that will keep them comfortable while he's at work. Winston is last inside, stopping every few steps to smell something in the grass.

None of them are Cerberus, but he loves each of them regardless. Loves that they don't care if he puts on a dress and twirls around the house, don't mind when he stays up all night crying, feeling his husband's absence like a missing limb. A dog makes a promise that people can't, a promise to love and never leave, to slobber and chew his shoes and wag their tails when he comes home, whether he's done a good job or a bad one. Dogs accept people as they come.

As class is dismissed, Jack Crawford walks into his office. Will wants to roll his eyes, but there are still students in the room, hanging back to eavesdrop on what the head of the

Behavioral Science Unit could possibly want from him. He is, after all, just a professor, training agents before they're sent into the field like lambs to the slaughter. Waving all of the stragglers away, he gives Jack a nod.

"Mr. Graham," Jack says, forgoing a greeting, but still bothering to keep up appearances. The door behind the last student closes and Will forces himself to smile.

"Father," Will replies, allowing only a small amount of annoyance to drip into his words. "How are you doing?"

"Fine. I'd be better if mortals would stop finding increasingly creative and terrible ways to kill each other, but that's part of why I'm here."

As usual, Jack lacks subtlety in getting to the point. Will appreciates the saved time, because he already knows what Jack wants. It's the same thing everyone wants, in this century. In centuries passed, Will was almost burned at the stake for the abilities he possesses. Now, everyone wants to see his party trick, wants to use it to their petty crimes, to make their lives easier.

"Can I borrow your imagination?" Jack asks, even though they both know it's unnecessary. He was never going to say no. As Will packs up his laptop and throws his messenger bag over his shoulder, he wonders why Jack even bothers asking.

"Lead the way," he replies, and they begin the walk across campus. "I'm assuming this is about the missing girls in Minnesota?" He pauses, trying to remember the last article he read about it. "There were seven, right?"

"Eight."

"When did you tag the eighth?"

"About three minutes before I walked into your lecture hall," Jack replies honestly. "The local police were reluctant to accept our help, so it felt useless to come ask you until we were invited."

"And you're calling them abductions because you have no bodies," Will extrapolates. Jack nods, and for a second, Will thinks. "Then those girls weren't taken from wherever the police think they were."

Inside Jack's office, Will looks over the board, takes a moment to look at all of the girls and examine their features one by one, rather than letting them become the same person in his head. They all look like him, like Persephone. This isn't a thought he chooses to voice.

"They all look like Mall of America," he mutters instead. "The perfect Midwestern woman."

"So our guys got a type," Jack says, but Will shakes his head.

"It's not about having a type. It's not about all of these girls. It's about one of them. Or maybe none of them. Maybe these girls are all substitutes for the one he really wants."

"What do you mean?"

Gesturing to the photos, Will thinks it must be obvious.

"All of these girls look the same, Jack. That's not a coincidence, that's how he's choosing them. These aren't victims of opportunity but rather a carefully curated selection of victims, all designed to emulated someone he either can't kill, or already has. There's a woman out there who is a mold for all the others. To him, these are just copies." Pausing, he turns to Jack. "But you didn't need me for that. You have Heimlich at Harvard and our dear Alana at Georgetown. All of them would have told you the same thing."

"That's not really true, is it?" Will glares. "Do you deny that you make jumps you can't explain?"

"The evidence explains everything."

"Then help me find some evidence."

Will looks back at the photos, at eight different versions of himself, all missing, all probably dead by now. There will be more, he knows; a person with this level of obsession won't stop until he's caught, and if he's smart enough not to kill the one he wants, the one he knows, dozens could die before that happens. Their eyes will stare at him in his dream, look back at him through the mirror when he puts on a dress and styles his hair.

"When do I get to see him again?" Will asks.

“Are you trying to make a deal?”

“And if I am?”

Jack pauses, and Will knows he’s thinking about it, trying to decide how much pull he has with Alana, how much he can beg and bargain.

“Come with me to Minnesota. By the time you get back, I’ll have talked Alana into something. What’s a few decades off the clock?”

“Time has lessened her anger?” Will says. It would be the first time he’s heard of it.

“It’s given her other ideas, though. She stopped being angry at least a millennium ago.”

With a nod, Will holds out a hand and shaking it feels like making a deal with the devil. Hades would appreciate the irony in that.

Minnesota is flat, boring, and routine. Sitting on the couch, Mr. and Mrs. Nichols clasp each other’s hands like anchors in the storm, and Will knows the worst has only just begun. Mr. Nichols is trying to make himself believe his daughter ran away, got on a train and headed toward an adventure. Mrs. Nichols seems to have decided her daughter is already dead, that hope is a fool’s errand, and from where Will is standing, she’s likely right.

“How’s the cat?” He asks. Mrs. Nichols raises her eyebrows and wrings her hand. Jack glares at him, but Will ignores it.

“What?”

“Elise was supposed to feed it, wasn’t she? If it hadn’t eaten all weekend, it must have been hungry.”

The room is quiet as the pair try to decide what to make of him. Will is used to this and waits patiently as they think.

“I didn’t notice.”

Pulling Jack away from the two, he lowers his voice to a whisper.

“He took her from here. She got off the train, came home, fed the cat. And then he took her.”

With a bad feeling in the pit of his stomach, Will asks the Nichols to stay down in the living room as he and Jack climb the stairs to Elise’s room. Putting on a glove, he reaches down and turns the handle slowly, opening the door and stepping into the dark room. His eyes adjust to the dark before Jack’s, and on her bed rests Elise Nichols, arms crossed over her chest and blood on her sheets.

“Call an ERT,” Will tells Jack, “and get the Nichols out of here. Their house just became a crime scene.” A pause. “And while they’re on their way, I’ll do my thing.”

Jack nods, leaving the room, and Will lets his eyes close. Takes deep breaths, opening and closing his hands as he counts down from ten, and then he opens them.

The room is darker now, streetlights shining in from outside and the window closed. Will watches it slide open,, can feel the cold glass on his skin, watches a faceless man climb into the room, pushing the curtains out of the way as he does. The faceless man looks around the room, looks at Elise, watches her chest rise and fall in her sleep. Steps toward her bed slowly, runs a hand over her hair and takes in the way she stirs in her sleep.

Will watches the faceless stranger creep over her bed, watches him climb on top of her, watches him strangle her, watches her try to scream as she struggles beneath him. It’s all clear, as if he’s there, as if he’s the killer, but something is wrong. There’s someone else in the room, someone who doesn’t belong, someone-

“You’re Will Graham.”

Will doesn’t know who this woman is. Doesn’t recognize her, doesn’t fully recognize himself in this moment.

“You’re not supposed to be in here.”

Worry fills him. What if he had changed here, if things had gone terribly wrong, he could have attacked her, could have gotten lost in the killer’s mind and taken over his actions. This woman doesn’t know how much danger she was in, and still gathering himself, Will can’t find a way to tell her. He follows their conversation with half of his mind while the rest of it is picking itself up and piecing itself back together again, keeping what is him and archiving all that is Other.

Jack is chastising this woman, and the woman is telling Jack about antler velvet and a man is standing next to him, talking about how deer and elk defend themselves.

“Antler velvet is rich in nutrients. He may have put it there on purpose.” Something is wrong, a piece of the Other’s mind that doesn’t fit in.

“You think he wanted to heal her?”

Will shakes his head.

“He was trying to undo as much as he could. He’d already killed her, but he put her back where he found her. Whatever he did to the others, he couldn’t do to her.”
A glance around the room reveals three unfamiliar faces staring at him in confusion.

“Is this his mold?” Jack asks. Taking a bottle of Aspirin out of his pocket, will pops two, swallowing them dry.

“No,” he says. “This is an apology.”

He’s supposed to have seen Hades by now. That was the deal. Will delivers a profile and Jack delivers his husband. Will goes back to teaching and his dogs and builds a home and a life with the man he loves, and if Jack needs help in the future, he can call on Will.

Splashing his face with water, Will tries to take a deep breath, tries to keep his head on straight. He needs Hades, needs a calm, strong presence to put hands on her shoulders and run fingers through her hair. He would whisper to her in languages that she didn’t know, ancient, guttural tongues that he learned from his subjects, and she would listen, close her eyes and let the sound wash over her.

“What are you doing in here?” Jack asks, and she turns, her hair flying with the speed of it. Jack locks the bathroom door.

“Shit,” she mutters, looking at the way her clothes now sag on her, shirt hanging around her shoulders and pants threatening to fall off.

“Do you respect my judgment?” Jack asks, and Persephone nods. “We have a better chance of catching this guy if you’re in the saddle. And if just thinking about seeing Hades again does this to you, it might be best to wait until after this is over.”

Persephone wants to scream, wants to throw things at Zeus, wants to hurt him. She punches the door of the nearest stall, savoring the sting in her fist and the clang the door makes as it swings back into the wall.

"I'm not in the saddle because Hades isn't here," she bites. "I don't know this type of psychopath. I have a specialty with monsters but Hades was always better at putting them into boxes. I just experience them. He has always been my anchor, Zeus, and you know that. I don't know what else to tell you."

"You could tell me something about him or you wouldn't have said this was an apology. What's he apologizing for?"

Shaking her head, she tugs at her hair, can feel the pull of the roots against her scalp.

"He couldn't honor her He feels guilty."

"Feeling guilt defeats the purpose of being a psychopath, doesn't it?" Zeus's tone is level for once, and it infuriates her.

"No shit," she shouts, leaning against the wall.

"The what kind of crazy is he?"

Hands clenched so tight she's beginning to lose feeling, Persephone takes a deep breath, starting a twenty and counting down. By the time she's hit zero, her fingers loosen and her arms fall to her side.

"He couldn't show her he loved her, so he put her corpse back where he killed it. It's not sexual. He doesn't want them to suffer. He kills them quickly, things he's being merciful." She pauses, and then he steps away from the wall. Will looks back at Jack.

"He has to take the next girl soon. He knows he's going to get caught, one way or the other."

When he first chose to work in law enforcement, standing in an autopsy suite was a comfort. It was the closest he could get to his husband without death, and the smell of it wrapped around him, something he could use to reminisce.

Beverly talks with the other two, Price and Zeller. Now that the Other has been properly stored away and he's learned their names, they don't bother him. They're mortals, but they. More than that, in each of them is a drive to help people, something Will admires. All of them could have chosen easier lives: could have taken private sector jobs with cushy pay and benefits, stock options and retirement plans. Instead, they were here, overworked, underpaid, under appreciated.

"Curly piece of metal is all we got," she tells them, a small smile on her lips. They're all content to let him stand in the back and listen, let his thoughts run. How did that piece of metal get there? With its composition, it could only have been so many things.

"We should be looking at plumbers, steamfitters, tool workers. The type of tools required to cut a metal of that strength weren't something a normal person would have. They were highly-specialized, expensive tools. Construction sites and factories, both would have the tools needed. They wouldn't find their killer working on anything in his garage, at least.

Elise Nichols is there for only a moment, hung from antlers and hair falling in her face. It's almost a painting, almost a piece of art. Hades would approve of the vision, would claim it made a statement about the fragility of man, spoke to how nature could destroy even the strongest of foes.

It shouldn't exist, though. This is not him stepping into someone else's mind. This is not a night terror. For this moment, Will is hallucinating, a piece of information he doesn't quite know how to handle.

Zeller's voice in the background pulls him back.

"Her liver was removed. He took it out and put it back in."

"Why cut out her liver if he was just going to sew it back in again?" Price asks, and reviewing what he knows about the Other, picking at each piece of information.

"Something was wrong with the meat," he whispers.

“She has liver cancer,” Zeller tells him, and Will doesn’t need to look up to know that the man is shocked. Of course no bodies have turned up, he thinks. There’s nothing left of the bodies to find.

“He’s eating them.”

Will leaves the morgue then, prepared to march his way into Jack’s office and demand to see his husband. If he’s going to keep working this case, he’s owed that much.

Jack Crawford is, by and large, an incredibly boring and predictable man. With dreams of heroism and an over-inflated ego, despite his best posturing at humility, their conversations are generally deathly boring. Zeus could have at least found a more interesting way to spend his time on Earth, if he was going to force Hades to join him on the surface.

When Hannibal opens the exit for his patients to find Jack standing there, Hannibal forces himself to take a deep breath.

“I hate to be discourteous, but this is a private exit for my patients,” he tells Jack. “I’ll see you next week, Franklyn.”

Despite it being obvious that the man wishes to stay, Hannibal watches him walk down the hallway and out of the building. Inviting Jack inside, he closes and locks the door behind him.

“How can I help you today, brother?” Hannibal asks, too tired for niceties. A problem arose in the Underworld in the early hours of the morning, drawing him out of bed and setting him on the path to a dreadful day.

“For once, Hades, I’m here to tell you about how I can help you.”

Just like that, his anger vanishes. Since they were born, Zeus has been an annoyance. His quick temper and carelessness got them into trouble often, and his tendency to sleep around created tension among the other gods

But it gave Hades a great gift, in one particular indiscretion. There has always been one thing his brother can do for him, besides leave him alone, and that's negotiate. Hades, after all, has history. All of the other gods tolerate him, but few like him.

"It's over," Zeus continues, walking around Hades' office and looking around.

"The time is only half way over. That can't possibly be right."

Zeus smiles.

"Your wife learned a lot from you, Hades. She struck a deal with me, made me negotiate with Demeter. Luckily, she's gone soft over time."

Hades had seen Demeter multiple times since the separation started, and though it was tense, they'd managed to remain friendly. At John Hopkins, he posed as her mentor, because it was easier to slide her through with his help than try and trick another professional. It never seemed like there was any change in the way she actually felt about him, just a willingness to work with him despite the tension.

"You must have had some incredible leverage," Hades says, turning this all over in his head. "Or something you wanted."

"I want Persephone to help me put people behind bars," Zeus tells him. "According to her, I need you to keep her stable. If that means I have to use the dirt I have on Demeter and offer her bribes as well, I'm more than willing to do that. She required something from you, as well; I accepted on your behalf." Hades glares and so Zeus continues. "You're the only one with the power to make someone immortal. She wants a pass on one person. One soul that she gets to keep forever. It's a small price to pay for your wife."

True as that may be, it frustrates Hades that the choice was made without his consent. His brother used his status as king of the gods less and less, over the centuries, but it was times such as this that Hades was reminded.

"I'm assuming you have no objection?"

"Many," Hades replies. "But none to the deal itself, only with how it was made." Looking around his office, he's grateful there are no more patients for the day. A few journals sit on

his desk, his planned reading for the night, but they can wait for another day. “When can I see her.

“All you have to do is come with me to Quantico. She stormed into my office with Demeter yesterday, told me she wouldn’t leave until I brought you to her. I convinced her that she could see you tomorrow.” Jack laughs. “I’m lucky you chose to live so close.”

Hannibal is already grabbing his coat as Jack finishes his sentence.

The room is quiet, the ticking of Jack’s clock in the background keeping Will grounded. Each second passes like a year, dragging on and separating him from the love of his life.

“What’s taking them so long?” He mutters, ignoring the way Alana smiles at him. Standing, he puts his hands in his pockets and starts walking around the room, running his hands over the spines of Jack’s bookshelves and staring blankly at the titles. The letters are all there, but Will can’t read a single word.

“Hades lives and works in Baltimore. It’s not much of a drive, but there is a distance.”

“He had all day to go down and break the news,” Will snaps. “Even a phone call would have been good enough.” Wincing, he turns back to Alana. “Sorry. I wasn’t able to sleep last night. Between nightmares about this killer and the excitement to see Hades, it was a rough one.”

“Nightmares?”

His intention had been to keep quiet about them. There was no need for anyone to know, outside of Hades and him. His husband would come back, and with his help, they’d talk through the dreams Will was having, figure out what was wrong and address the issue. When Persephone took those pomegranate seeds into her mouth, let the juices stain her fingers, she died. With Hades’ blessing, she became immortal, and as her story was passed throughout the land, people prayed to her. Souls trapped in their lives who needed to escape, people in desperate situations who turned to her for hope.

Persephone learned to see them. Learned to read the impressions they left, learned to stand in the presence of a body and watch their last terrible or wonderful moments play out behind her

eye lids. Sometimes, they stayed with her. Followed her down into the Underworld and climbed into her dreams, left her tossing and turning, sitting upright clutching the sheets and gasping for breath. Hades would talk her down, remind her where she was and that she was safe. In the time he'd been away, Persephone had never really learned how to cope on her own.

"They're nothing," Will tells her. "It's just impressions that stick around a little too long. They'll be gone as soon as we wrap this up, and then I can go back to normal. Hades will be here, and everything will be okay."

Alana looks at him with suspicion in her gaze, but footsteps approach the door, and she lets the subject drop. The handle closes, and slowly, the door opens, bright florescent lights from the hallway flooding in. Jack walks in first, and then, his husband follows.

All Will can do is stare. He's not frozen, he's not dumbfounded. It's just all he can do, is look at his husband and know that, so long as they exist, they will never be parted again. Even when they are separated, when duties calls them apart, they'll never be alone.

"Hello, dear," he says, smiling, and as if all he needed to do was break the silence, Hades rushes toward him.

Hades' lips are perfect. They're chapped and thin and everything he remembers them being, his hands gripping firmly. Were it not for his parents in the room, Will would already be removing clothing, but at the moment, privacy eludes them, and he's forced to pull away so he can acknowledge the other two.

"Thank you for your cooperation, Demeter," Will says, taking Hades' hand in his own and rubbing his thumb along the back. "I know it was strange for you to bend the rules."

Alana smiles at him, only a bit forced, and he returns it.

"It was inevitable, really. Going back, we all have things we would change. Time has a way of teaching us when nothing else will."

Knowing it's the closest he'll ever get to an apology, Will decides to accept it. Nothing else matters, with his husband back.

"I'm sure you both want a bit of time," Jack says, ruining the moment as he is wont to do. "But while I have you both here, I was hoping I could ask a favor."

And just like that, they've agreed to go to Minnesota again before they've had a chance to

say anything more than hello, because time can't teach Zeus tact. Minimal conversation gets them out of Jack's office and into the parking lot, where Hades insists Will take his coat, rather than going back for his own, and Will insists they take his car, rather than driving separately.

"We'll both be leaving our cars here for the trip to Minnesota," Will reasons. "Tomorrow we can drop by wherever you live, and you can pack a bag."

"I was hoping to cook you dinner," Hades replies, smile fond, and Will wants to kiss it off his face. In a fit of joy, he remembers that he can.

"You can cook me dinner another time," Will whispers as he pulls away. "I have things at home that I have to get back to." Hades raises an eyebrow, and Will smirks. The argument is over, and Hades walks around to climb in Will's car.

"I could not pictured a house for you anymore perfectly if I tried," Hades tells him as they turn the corner of his driveway and bring the building into view. In the cloudy, midday sun, his house looks less like the beacon of light it was when he bought it and more like a dreary shack. But it's his home, and that means something. They climb out of the car, and Hades reaches for his hand before he makes a move toward the house.

It's then that Will remembers his bed is in his living room, and he has only a moment to be ashamed before the dogs begin barking, well aware that he's come home early and already demanding his attention.

"I see you missed Cerberus," Hades says, smiling softly as he watches Winston jump at the window, fighting for space with Bailey.

Unlocking the door with one hand proves to be more of a challenge than Will presumed, but despite the practicality, he doesn't let go of Hades' hand. Like flood gates opening, the dogs rush out to greet them as he opens the door, surrounding the pair and sniffing at hands. It only takes a few commands for will to settle them, but Hades seems amused by their rowdy nature. Their hands part long enough to close the door. Hades has him pressed against it in seconds, his nose settled in the crook of Will's neck.

"I'm intrigued by your new body," Hades tells him, hands mapping a path from his hips up to his shoulder blades. "For once you are as strong in physicality as you are in will. It suits you."

"Funny you should mention will," he replies, settling his arms on Hades' shoulders. "People

are going to think you're insane if you call me Persephone. To the rest of the world, my name is Will Graham."

He's still short enough that he can tuck his head under Hades' chin, so he does. The familiar position feels like coming home.

"Will is short for William, I assume?"

"Is elegance your first concern?" He jokes back, leaning back so he can look Hades in the eye. "Be grateful that I don't go by Billy."

With one last kiss, Will pulls away, taking a moment to greet the pack. A quick look at them all tells Will they could use some time outside, so he walks through the living room and into the kitchen, opening the back door.

"My chosen alias is Dr. Hannibal Lecter," Hades tells him, standing in the kitchen.

Will hums as he comes back to Hades, settling a hand on his waist and rolling the name around in his head.

"It suits you," he settles on after a moment off thought. "Rolls of the tongue well. But Doctor?"

"Of psychiatry. I was a surgeon for a period of time, but eventually I left the ER behind. The ways in which humans are broken mentally interest me far more, and either way I am capable of fixing them."

With a huff, Will turns around, opening his cabinets to grab the coffee, hoping to start a pot. The spot on the shelf is still empty; with the case in Minnesota, he hadn't found time to go to the grocery store.

"I have whiskey, gin, or water," Will says as he turns. "I would have coffee, but I can't seem to remember to buy more."

Hades- or rather, Hannibal, laughs, stepping forward until Will bumps against the counter.

"I can think of other thirsts to quench," Hannibal whispers against his lips. As if the universe is conspiring against him, his phone rings. Out of habit, Will pulls it out to check on it, seeing the call is from Jack.

"I hate your brother so much," Will tells Hannibal as he answers the phone. "This better be incredibly important."

"It is," Jack says, his voice grim. "I'm going to need you both to come to Minnesota sooner than anticipated. They found another body."

After a terse goodbye, Will hangs up the phone and groans, leaning into Hannibal.

"I assume Jack had bad news, for you to be so distraught."

“You assume correct,” he replies, looking up and trying to remember if he still keeps a go bag packed. “There’s been another body. Jack wants us on the next plane to Minnesota.”

The air is brisk, wind pulling at his hair as he zips his jacket up and burrows more deeply into the collar. Hannibal is at his side, a picture of elegance mirroring Will’s worn and practical clothing, and they both sign onto the scene with the uniform officer who’s keeping the scene contained. Jack is somewhere, and they’re both supposed to check in with him, but first, Will looks over the field.

Autumn is just beginning to kiss the trees, taking them from green to gold, and for now their somewhere in between. The yellowing wildflowers shimmer in the sun, glinting almost like the golden band he’s worn since he became Will Graham. No one has ever met his husband, given that Will hadn’t seen him for two millenniums. The only people he talks to are Jack and Alana, so explaining has never been complication. Being a recluse had its benefits.

The body is mounted on a deer head, its antlers piercing the skin and leaving trails of blood down her pale skin. In her naked state, the crows perching on her give a small sense of modesty, but their actions feel disrespectful, and Will is glad when Beverly shoos them away so she can begin collecting evidence from the body.

It’s macabre, sadistic, and beautiful; death elevated to the level of art. He spares only a small glance Hannibal’s way, and though his face is impassive, Will can tell he’s pleased by what he sees. Such is the life of the king of the dead.

“I feel like I’m dreaming,” Will says, turning away from his husband and looking for Jack in the crowd of dozens of people gathering evidence. Jack finds them first.

“The head was reported stolen last night about a mile from here,” he starts, as if greetings are irrelevant.

“Just the head?” Hannibal replies, and Will has to take a deep breath to stop himself from laughing.

Zeller is photographing the body as Price talks to one of the local officers. Something is wrong, nestling itself as a thought in the back of his mind and refusing to forfeit it’s space.

“Minneapolis homicide already made a statement. They’re calling him the ‘Minnesota Shrike.’”

Conversation continues around him as Will looks over the body. She’s not the same as the other girls, close but not right. Her eyes are too dark and her hair is too light, curling instead

of lying straight. Even her features are different, sharper and more mature. Whoever their Jane Doe is, she's older than the other girls by at least a few years.

Even the presentation is different. It's sloppy and shrewd, a spectacle. He wanted her found this way, the homicidal equivalent of fecal smearing, equal parts petulant and mocking.

"He wanted her found this way," Will says as he wanders back to the group. "It's not about her, it's about us."

"How so?" Jack asks.

"Whoever tucked Elise Nichols into bed didn't paint this picture." Will waves his hand at the body, at the tableau laid before them. "Our killer loves these girls. He doesn't want them to suffer, doesn't want them degraded like this. He wants to cherish them."

Behind them, Zeller sets down his camera and examines the open wound on her chest.

"He took her lungs," he tells them, disgust in his voice. "I think she was still alive when he cut them out."

Standing back from the scene, Will closes his eyes. He's not trying to deconstruct the scene; he doesn't need to. This crime was spelled out for him.

"This is a copy cat," Will says. "Our killer doesn't want to destroy his victims,, he wants to consume them. Whoever did this saw her as if she was disposable."

"You're certain?" Jack asks, and Will can't tell if it's for show or something else. Either way, it frustrates him.

"The cannibal who killed Elise Nichols had a place to do it. He has a house, probably a cabin, some place where he could butcher the girls. He doesn't want to be caught; he wouldn't display a body so brazenly."

Hannibal has gone to talk with Zeller, examining the body. Will watches him as he thinks.

"We're already looking at Minnesota steamfitters and plumbers and cross referencing people with hunting licenses."

But that's not enough. Will knows something is miss. It's floating through the air right in front of him, and Will can smell it, but he can't place the smell. Like trying to remember something from your childhood, the memories are muddy.

Why was the distaste this killer felt for his victim so important?

It was a foil to the Shrike, who cared for his victims like a father, tucking them into bed and-

Like a father.

"He has a daughter. Same age as the other girls. Same hair color, same eye color, same everything." Why would he need to make these girls a part of him? He thinks. Why is that so

important? “She’s leaving home. He can’t stand the thought of losing her.” Will turns back to Jack , horror taking hold of him and twisting his guts as he thinks about this poor girl. “She’s his mold.”

“What about the copy cat?” After taking a moment to look back at the body, at the crows and the sun in the sky, Will decides to opt for honesty.

“An intelligent psychopath, particularly a sadist, is hard to catch. There’s no traceable motive. There’ll be no patterns. He may never kill like this again.” Will shrugs, looking from Jack to Hannibal. “I could build you a profile, but the odds of catching him are slim to none, unless he kills again, and building a profile off one kill is guesswork, at best.

“So we just let this guy go?”

Will wishes he had an answer for that. There in the field lies a girl who’s not right, doesn’t fit the profile. She died only because one man out there saw what the Shrike was doing and decided he wanted to take that and improve upon it. There's nothing Will can do for her and whoever the next victim will be. But he can do something to stop the next victim of the Shrike's from ever disappearing.

Persephone wakes up as the sun begins shining through a crack in the cheap, plastic hotel room curtains, Hades’ arm over her waist and nose in her hair. Joy fills her up like a balloon as she leans back into him. It’s been so long since she’s been able to feel this close to another person. All these years, centuries, what she has wanted more than anything has been to be with her husband, and now she has it.

Which brings her to the question of why she’s awake. Something pulled her out of sleep. Her phone is ringing on the bedside table. She pulls herself from Hades embrace, sighing as she sees it’s Zeus who’s calling.

“Fuck,” she says as she answers the phone. “I thought we weren’t meeting until eight.” Persephone glaces at the clock. “I still have an hour more to sleep.”

“I’m needed at the station today to direct all the evidence to the right place.” He pauses. “I’ve already faked a marriage license for you and Hades. I’ll give you the details later, but as of now it’s official that your consulting at the same time as your husband. Please keep that in mind.”

“Freddie came in handy, again, I assume?” He asks. She was often annoying, but Athena had adjusted most proficiently to the modern world. Persephone found her website tasteless, but she’d been willing to mislead the public on multiple occasions for the greater good.

“As she often does,” Jack replies. After the sparest of goodbyes, Persephone hangs up the phone.

Turning around, she finds Hades stirring in bed.

“Good morning,” she says, leaning down to kiss him. “Jack is going to be busy today, so it’s just you and I. Also, we’re married now. You owe Athena something nice, for taking care of that.”

Hades laughs.

“We’ll have to find out when our anniversary is,” he tells her, sitting up in bed and running a hand through his hair. It’s shorter than he used to wear it, barely hanging around his ears, and he’s allowed it to begin turning grey, giving him a sophisticated look that suits him.

“Knowing her, it’s April Fool’s Day.”

Standing from bed, Persephone goes to the bathroom and stands to pee before realizing that won’t work for her. She allows herself a moment of confusion as she sits there, wondering at what point in the night she shifted forms and why Jack chose not to comment on the difference in her voice. Normally, she only allows herself to present as female when she’s alone, just her and the dogs. It’s easier that way, no meddling parents to ask questions about identity changes or curious strangers trying to ask her out on dates.

When she comes back in the room, Hades has righted himself, beginning to put on his suit.

“I’m assuming you’re going to insist on sitting down for breakfast,” Persephone says, looking in her suitcase for a pair of clean slacks and a shirt that’s less rumpled. The only combination she finds tolerable is a tan shirt with dark slacks. Hardly the best fashion choice she’s made, but it’ll do.

As she slides them on, just like that, he’s Will again, hair wild from sleep and frame sturdy in a way Persephone isn’t. Will is a tree, but Persephone is wheat, moving with the wind.

“I am rather fond of taking my time and enjoying my food,” Hannibal replies, stepping closer to button Will’s shirt for him. “But if you’ve secretly become a fan of fast food breakfast while we were separated, I could indulge you this once.”

With an amused huff, Will wraps his arms around Hannibal’s shoulders. After so long apart, he finds himself reluctant to be out of physical contact. If he’s to keep Jack’s warning in mind, they’ll have to remain professional once they step outside their hotel room. Will is enjoying the closeness while he can. Food can wait for a minute.

The day has already begun to wear on Will as the pull up to the Hobbs residence. Popping an Aspirin after putting the rental car in park, a feeling settles in his stomach as the pill works its way down his throat. Less out of habit and more because of that feeling, Will takes a moment to ensure his gun is loaded, cocking it back to get a round in the chamber.

"Do you believe this is going to go poorly?" Hannibal asks as he watches, furrowing his eyebrows and unbuckling his seat belt.

"When I was a cop in New Orleans, our chief told us that part of the job was knowing you would walk into situations that make the hair on the back of your neck stand up. Over time, you develop a sixth sense for things. He never wanted us to ignore that feeling." Will pauses, grabbing his badge from the center console. "It could be nothing, and sometimes it was, but every time I get that feeling, I get ready for the world to explode around me."

Hannibal nods, taking a pause before climbing out of the car, and Will follows him.

Brown doors on tan brick make the house they stand in front of wholly unassuming. If all the houses on this street were put in a photo line up, Will isn't sure he'd be able to pick this house out while standing right in front of it. And still, despite the unassuming nature, Will maintains and iron-clad certainty that danger lies within it.

"Stay behind me," Will says as they stand in front of the door, and Hannibal takes a step back in reply. After a breath, a pause, a moment to collect himself and prepare for the inevitable, Will knocks on the door.

After a moment, a young girl opens the door. Her hair is brown, falling loosely around her shoulders, eyes almost piercingly light. Will knows in that moment his intuition was right. All of the other girls had only been a substitute, copies made from a mold, and they're staring at the original.

"Is your father home?" Will asks, trying to keep his voice neutral. "We need to ask him a few questions." Folding it opening, Will shows her his FBI credentials, and in that moment, her face flickers, just enough to tell Will that she knows why they're here. She knows what her father is, what her father has done. As she takes a step closer to them, her breathing shakes, and in the silence, she steps out the door, gesturing for them to go inside.

"Abigail?" A voice calls from the other room, and footsteps round the corner. Looking Garret Jacob Hobbs in the eye, there's a flash of terror in his eyes, color draining from his face, and he flees back the way they came.

Hands shaking as he grabs for his gun, Will follows, only taking a second to look back and make sure Hannibal is staying in the doorway.

"Garret Jacob Hobbs!" He yells, turning the corner and entering the kitchen to find Hobbs holding his wife in front of him, a knife to her throat. Before Will can get a clean shot, he pulls the knife across her throat, the arc of blood spraying across the room.

It’s only as her body falls limp to the floor that Will can shoot, one pull of the the trigger after another, until Hobbs is just a body twitching against his kitchen cabinets.

Footsteps make their way towards him quickly, and as he holsters his gun he reaches his hands towards Mrs. Hobbs neck, trying to stop the bleeding.

“Hannibal!” He calls. “Keep Abigail out there and get in here!”

And just like that, Hannibal is there, replacing his hands and trying to assess the situation. Will calls for an ERT, confirming the address, and as he’s talking to the dispatcher, he watches Abigail take careful, wobbly steps. Her hands fly to her mouth and she falls back into the wall, curling in upon herself.

Will wants to comfort her, but first, he has to call Jack.

“We found him,” he says, breathing raggedly. “We found the shrike.”

When the Sun Sets We're Both the Same

Chapter Summary

> “We found him,” he says, breathing raggedly. “We found the shrike.”
> ---
> Abigail remembers, Will makes a decision without consulting his husband, speaks to a therapist, and cuddles with her husband.

Chapter Notes

> this is late because nanowrimo started on the first and my life is a nightmare of writing, trying to find the right combination of antidepressants and sleep meds, a second funeral for october, and getting paid to take my clothes off. Thankfully, writing is something I can do at any time of day, including when my meds have me sleep through all of the sunny hours and I'm stuck at home awake through the whole night.
> That being said, if the next chapter comes out before the end of november, I will consider that a miracle. If you see any typos let me know; i did two rounds of edits (technically three because I preview as I paste the scenes from scrivener and format them) but I am human And Currently Very Tired Because I Should Have Been Asleep Two Hours Ago (but I was watching criminal minds and my sleep meds are just now kicking in)
> get lit though I have actually started writing chapter three

The lights of the interview room flicker for a second as Abigail looks around the room. From outside, through the one-way mirror, Will watches her fidget, obviously uncomfortable. Her hair is greasy and her eyes are developing dark bags underneath them that no amount of shitty police station coffee will solve. He wants to go in there and take her hand, comfort her, assure her there was nothing she could have done to change the way her father was.

If wishes were horses, Will thinks. His focus would be questioned and his judgment scrutinized. Jack would send him home, accuse him of trying to taint the investigation, and the risk isn’t worth the reward. Should she resent him for killing her father, there would be no point in losing his cool.

Still, Jack claps him on the shoulder, squeezing once.

“You can do this,” he says, as if it’s a pep talk he needs. “It’s like every other witness interview you’ve done.”

“Yes, because every witness is facing the realization their dad is a serial killer.”

She requested to talk to him specifically; Will is trying to hide it, but the way his hands shake and his brow sweats betray his nerves. Putting his hand on the door knob, Will takes a deep breath and goes inside.

“Hello,” he says and takes a seat at the table. “My name is Will Graham.”

She smiles at him weakly holds out her hand. She’s putting on a brave face, but Will can see the terror hiding just behind the veil. Does she know how well can read the truths written across her face?

“Abigail Hobbs,” she replies. “But I’m sure you know that by now.”

“I did.” A pause. “I wish I could wait more time to ask you these questions. It must be a shock, having lost both your parents in such a short time.”

Abigail looks to the glass behind Will, as if she can sense Jack’s presence just beyond what she can see. Her gaze is hard when she meets his eyes.

“I’ll be okay,” she says. “Dad raised me to be a survivor.”

“I’m sure he did.” Will glances down at the paper in his hand, all of the pieces of information Jack wants him to try and get. “Did you know anything was going on with your father?”

Abigail folds in on herself and shrugs. The defiant posture drains from her. There’s regret in her body, fear and guilt in the way her eyes can’t stay on one place for too long and regret in the way she bites her lip. Jack won’t know it because he’s never sat in that chair. Will has; he knows what to look for, knows what it’s like to be raised by a crazy person. Her mother may have changed over time, but the memory is there.

“I thought he was just made I wanted to go to Yale,” she tells him, her voice small, timid. It doesn’t suit her. Abigail should be strong and bold, brash and ready to challenge authority. She’s predator, not prey. “When I told him at the beginning of the year, he blew up at me. Shouted for an hour about how dangerous it was for me to move so far away and how ungrateful I was for the sacrifices he made for me, since I wanted to leave him so badly.” She takes a shaky breath. “He told me we’d visit state schools and I’d fall in love with one, something to keep me closer. I figured it was just worry.”

“You didn’t do anything wrong,” he stresses, letting himself forget the questions for a second. “You’re father was ill. What he needed was to seek psychiatric help for his abandonment issues, not…” Will lets himself trail off. It’s hard to say the words out loud, while she’s here with him, sitting so close.

“I know,” Abigail tells him, but her eyes on uncertain. Can Jack see the cracks around her edges, Will wonders? Can he tell that she’s lying through his teeth?

“How often did you hunt with your father?”

“Less after the fight,” she says. “Before we would go together at least once a month. He was hunting twice a month on his own, but I only went with him a few times.” This is a half-truth, Will knows, watches her eyes dart to the left as her mind makes up a story on the fly. Jack wouldn’t put it together, isn’t watching for her micro-expressions yet. “He would always come back with meat like he was still hunting, but there was never fur. He must have been just buying it at the store, I guess, or getting it from a friend.”

Will sighs. No one had told her yet.

“He wasn’t buying the meat,” Will says delicately. Jack will be watching for her reaction, wanting to know how much of the truth she’s telling. Did she know that while she was planning for her future, her father was defiling young women across the state, hunting them like they were prizes to be caught, prey to make his own instead of independent human beings with complex thoughts and feelings.

“What do you mean?” she asks, and she’s not faking, then. Her eyebrows are furrowed and she leans forward, as if bracing herself on the table will make whatever truth he has easier to bear.

It won’t, but Will appreciates that she’s trying.

“The meat he was bringing home-” he starts, but her eyes open wide as she processes everything at once.

“No…” she whispers, to herself and only herself. Tears are leaking from her eyes. “No, he wouldn’t make us do that.”

“He wanted you to understand,” Will says. Fuck Jack, he thinks as he reaches his hand across the table. She takes it and he squeezes. “He wanted you to know how much you meant to him, how much he wanted you to stay.”

Still, despite his attempts to comfort her, Abigail’s skin keeps getting paler, until her hands fly over her mouth. Will grabs the trash can from by the door and sets it in her lap, his hand on her back as she vomits. The sound echos through the room, and Will looks through the glass, where he know Jack is watching, and glares. This has gone on long enough.

Abigail brings her head up, wiping her mouth on the back of her hand and then cringing as she looks at what she’s done.

“I’d like to go to the bathroom, please,” she tells him, and Will nods.

“We can continue this after you’ve had a chance to sleep, Abigail.” Jack can yell at him later if he wants to. Will isn’t going to put her through more of this until the bags under her eyes are gone and her skin has color. She looks like Elise Nichols in her bed. “Sorry to tell you like this. I should have broken the news more delicately.”

Abigail shakes her head.

“There’s no good way to tell someone they’re a cannibal.”

Sunday night dinners take on a new meaning when she goes to high school. Her dad makes them all sit around the table and eat together, something they've done less and less with each passing year. School keeps her busy, between swim team, debate club, band, and all the other clubs she joined to impress colleges. The missed time with her family is hard, which makes her grateful for this time, but it's been worth it.

Yesterday when she got the mail, a letter from Princeton lay hidden among bills, grocery store fliers, and school bulletins. They were offering her a full ride, enough scholarships the refund would cover her books and most of her living expenses. Abigail couldn't wait to break the news.

Forcing herself to eat was difficult trying to act as if this was just a normal family meal. Words threatened to fall out of her mouth every time she opened it, in between mom's criticism of Father John's homily and dad's insistence it was fine.

"'Wives, be subjects to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord,'" her mother quotes. "This was the verse he chose to focus on, rather than the entire section before that where it goes over how to live as children of god. Or even the other parts of the passage, about how husbands should be gentle with their wives and children should obey their parents."

Dad laughs as he takes a sip of his beer, and Abigail takes the opportunity to clear her throat, setting down her fork so she can wring her hands under the table.

"I've got some news," she begins, trying to keep her voice from shaking. There's so much excitement in her body fighting for space that it's hard to keep her thoughts collected. "I know I sent out applications months ago, so it's been hard to remember all the schools I applied to, and I didn't want to tell you about them individually, so I waited until I got them all back.

"I got the last one yesterday when I brought the mail in, and I waited until we were all together." Pausing, Abigail takes a deep breath. "Not only did I get accepted to all the schools I applied to, but also, Yale offered me a full ride."

First, Abigail looks to her mother. After the moment it takes for the news to process, her smile grows wide.
Mom stands up, moving around the table to hug her, and she turns into it. All she can do is lean against her mother, smiling so widely her eyes close on their own. When mom pulls away and Abigail opens her eyes, dad is still sitting down, his hands clenched and his back straight.

"Dad?"

"Are the schools in Minnesota not good enough for you?" He asks. "You need to go to some fancy school on the East Coast where all those rich kids and their parents will look down on you for coming from honest, working people?"

Her mom starts to say something, but dad stands up, slamming his hands down on the table.

“I raised you better than this!” he shouts. “I raised you to be proud of who you are, and now you’re trying to make yourselves one of them.”

He storms out of the room, then, leaving his half-finished plate of food and slowly warming beer behind. Tears threaten to fall down her face as her mom takes her hand.

“He’ll get over it,” she tells Abigail. “It’s just a shock. He never thought you’d want to go so far from home. It’ll take some adjusting, but he wants you to be happy. And if Yale is what makes you happy, he’ll see that.” She pauses. “Maybe visit a few state schools with him, though, appease him a little bit.”

For rest of the night, her father is gone, off hiding somewhere and licking his wounds after the verbal lashing mom gave him. He’ll apologize later, and they’ll agree to go see a few colleges around the state, in case one of them is a good fit for her. In secret, Abigail accepts Yale’s offer, planning with her mom while dad is on hunting trips and hiding all the paperwork under her bed when he comes back.

Standing inside the door, Will focuses on how normal the room looks. There’s a table pushed against the wall, right under a window by the door. It’s stained with blood, knives sitting on it in a neat line. This, Will knows, is where Hobbs butchered deer, but it’s also where he tore apart the bodies of seven girls. Elise Nichols never received the honor.

Deep in the Chippewa National Forest, this cabin of nightmares seems harmless. It reminds Will of hunting in the 1800s, when he wouldn’t eat if he didn’t catch it himself, when Persephone had a garden behind her house and people in town would whisper because she hadn’t taken a husband at 28, making her an old maid, a lonely spinster.

Will refocuses. Stairs in the corner are hidden in shadows, Eastern morning sun shining through the window. Ignoring Jack completely, Will heads to the stairs, taking them one at a time as he comes to the second story of the cabin. Horror surrounds him.

The walls are covered in antlers, so thick Will worries he could disappear in them like the other girls. Despite his fear, his hand reaches for a glove in his pocket, putting it on so he can ghost his hand across the bramble, never quite touching it.

Following the wall, Will comes to the centerpiece of the room, a massive rack of antlers mounted to the wall. The tips of the white bones are stained red. Will knows it’s blood without having to send a sample to the labs. To Hobbs it was a place of honor. To the girls it was just another postmortem humiliation.

He hears it when Jack walks up the stairs behind him, comes to stand on the other side of the upstairs and makes his own walk around. FBI evidence tags cover every surface, but they do little to obstruct the disturbing scene.

“Could be a permanent installation in you Evil Minds museum,” Will says, resisting the urge to run his hand over the rack where the victims were bled and gutted, their organs removed

and their meat harvested. Even with a glove, he might disturb something, and this was a vital piece of evidence.

“What we learn from Hobbs will help us catch the next killer. There are still seven bodies we haven’t found.” Will hums a moment before shaking his head.

“There’s nothing to find. He consumed all of them.”

“Had to be parts he didn’t eat.”

“Not necessarily,” Will says. “Bones could be made into knives, skin tanned into a sort of leather, hair used for the stuffing of pillows.” Will could go into more detail, but he holds back. No need to give Jack ideas.

Jack is quiet as he circles around the room, looking at the antlers. Will turns, watches him run a hand over his chin.

“What if Hobbs wasn’t eating alone.” Jack glances back at him. “It’s a lot of work. Disappearing these girls, butchering them and then worse. All without leaving a shred of evidence outside of this room.”

“Someone he hunted with?”

“Someone at the police station, who he took hunting often.”

Will’s heart stops. It’s difficult to control, to keep his face calm. This presents a problem. How does he save Abigail from this? Jack needs someone to blame, now that Hobbs dead, someone to die on the cross for these crimes. Abigail provides a convenient scapegoat, but she didn’t aid in these killings willingly, and Will won’t let her go down for them.

“Abigail Hobbs is a suspect?”

“We’ve been doing door-to-door interviews. Hobbs and his daughter spent a lot of time together, including here. She was the only hunting partner he had; the rest of the town thought he was too weird.” He pauses. “She would have been the ideal bait, wouldn’t she?”

“Hobbs killed alone.” Will is holding back. Hobbs would want to make her part of the ritual, but he would never bring her to the killings themselves. He was to careful, to paranoid to allow there to be a witness to the actual murder.

Staring at the ground, Will studies the floor. His eyes walk up and down the floorboards, trying to find anything to help him change the subject.

In the corner, he spots a long, curly hair. Pulling out a pair of tweezers, he grabs an evidence bag and puts the hair inside it. Then he holds it up for Jack to see.In the dim light of the room, it should appear dark and dingy, and yet it shines unnaturally golden.

“An old friend of ours was here,” he says, and at the sight of the hair, Jack rolls his eyes.

When Will gets a call that something is wrong with Abigail in the middle of the day, he heads to the station straight away. It's been a few days since he last saw her. Between checking the cabin and the house for evidence and filling out the proper paper for discharging his weapon in the field, Will has kept himself busy.

Under her eyes, the bags are still present and her shoulders are slumped as she curls into herself.

"I'm sure she'll answer," she tells the deputy she's sitting across from. "She just needs to wake up, I'm sure she'll let me stay with her." The deputies reply is unclear, but it dampens Alice's spirits further.

"What's the problem?" Will asks another deputy, standing back so that he can watch the scene without drawing attention to himself.

"Her family doesn't want anything to do with her," he says. "She has an aunt two towns over, but they won't come to pick her up. Think she's just as bad as him." The deputy shakes his head. "It's a shame. She's been polite the entire time, even though she's gone through a shock. One of the dispatchers has been letting her sleep on the couch, but she's about to go on vacation. Since she's 19, it's not like we can try and place her with a foster family." Hannibal isn't here. If he was, he would try to talk Will out of what he's about to do. Say it was stupid, that there was no way to hide who they are, and a mortal can't possibly comprehend what they are.

Will ignores the phantom voice of his husband in the back of his head and walks across the room to crouch in front of Abigail.

"Hello again, Abigail" he says as she puts down the phone, returning her weak smile.

"They tell me your having trouble finding a place to stay, and I may have a solution for you. I think a change of scenery might be good for you. And if you want to go to Yale, you've gotta get used to the East Coast, right?" She nods. "My husband Hannibal and I live in Baltimore. Or Wolf Trap, Virginia. Both, I guess?" He shakes his head. "You could come stay with us until you figure out what's going on with your friend Marissa."

The officer sitting across from her frowns a little.

"You sure your boss'll be okay with that?" he asks, and Will shrugs.

"I think there are more important things than my boss's happiness." He turns back to Abigail. "Is that all right with you? You don't have to say yes. I just thought you might like the option."

As her shoulders loose, her smile grows wider, actually reaching her eyes this time.

"I'd like that a lot."

"Let's go find Hannibal, then," Will says, and he holds a hand out in front of both of them, letting her go first as they walk toward the door.

“Did you ask your husband before you asked me?” Abigail asks, and Will laughs.

“Absolutely not, but he’s never said no to me before. This won’t be the first time, I promise.”

Wrapped in Hades’ arms, Persephone tries to feel calm. Abigail is sequestered in her room, trying to hide from the truth. It won’t help, but Persephone can’t blame her. They’ve been in Baltimore for a week, and when she comes out of the room she’s claimed to talk to them, her sentences are stilted. She’s awkward around them, guarded, like an animal just brought home from the shelter, worried about getting taken back.

It’s been a balancing act, trying to find the right level of involvement to keep her company.

Abigail takes to Hannibal more easily, which isn’t surprising. For all that Persephone knows about psychology, Abigail is interested in therapy and psychiatry, whereas Persephone has no interest in picking apart someone’s mind and giving it clinical terms.

As they lie in bed, the street lights shining in the windows of Hades’ room, Persephone wonders how long it will take for Abigail to come out of her shell. At some point, they both need to sit down with her and explain what they know; she helped her father kill his victims, but she didn’t want to, and that was what mattered.

“You try me sometimes, darling,” Hades says, breaking the silence and running a hand through her hair. “Nine dogs, and you adopt us a child, as well.”

“She had no one else,” she whispers, turning to look at him. “What else could I do but be there for her? She needed me as I, you.” A pause for consideration. “Well, no. She needed a mother. I can be that.”

Hades sighs, burying his nose in her hair.

“She’ll never know you’re her mother, though, will she? You’ll always be Will Graham to her. She’ll go off to school and we’ll see her at breaks. Then she’ll grow up and stop visiting, because we aren’t her parents. We can’t replace them for her. This isn’t another dog.”

Persephone stands up, then. She leaves Hades on the bed and walks down the stairs, heads into the kitchen and puts a kettle on the stove top. After a deep breath, she takes a moment to examine the room. In the few times she’s been here, it’s always struck her as such an organized room, another kingdom for her husband to rule.

But beyond that, she notices the disorder. A mortar and pestle with the remnants of spices in the bottom, the stainless steel table with water spots across the surface and a small blood stain in the corner, and knick knacks on the window sill, a glass pomegranate, a ceramic dog, little things. As the water is boiling, she examines them all.

“They all remind me of you,” Hades says, wrapping his arms around her waist from behind. “Most of them were collected in the Underworld. When Zeus decided it was pointless for me to stay there when everyone else was up here, I brought them with me.”

In the corner, there's one Persephone recognizes. It's a ring, a thin, silver band with six purple stones. She left it with Hades when they were separated, a piece to hold onto until she came back.

"You could put it back on," he says. "They can't take you away anymore." With her ring upstairs, wont to fall off Persephone's thin fingers, she slides it on.

"We both know that's not entirely true," Persephone says, turning around in his arms. "At any time, we could be told you have to go back down, and I'd have to stay up here to make sure Abigail was okay."

Hades shakes his head.

"We have the upper hand. They need you, and you need me."

"I can't solve crimes like this forever." Taking a deep breath, Persephone grabs the kettle off the stove and pours water into her mug. "You know what happened last time, before all this happened. I went crazy. I lost my mind, forgot who I was. There's only so long I can keep them happy before I forget myself in the process, until I'm only monsters."

As her tea steeps, Persephone jumps up to sit on the counter and he settles between her legs, his hands resting on her hips. She leans into him, lets him bear her weight and her burden.

"Then we'll make a plan," he tells her. "We'll work with them long enough to get away. Run so far they'll never find us." He kisses the top of her head and she hears him inhale heavily through his nose.

"Did you just smell me?" she asks.

"I could hardly help it," he replies. "It's been so long since I've had the luxury."

In the quiet of the night, Persephone takes a deep breath. A noise upstairs frightens her and as footsteps come down the stairs, she shifts.

Will's grateful he was wearing men's clothing as Abigail makes her way into the kitchen.

"Ew, gross," she jokes, and when Hannibal steps away, she rolls her eyes. "I'm kidding. I woke up and heard you guys talking. Thought it might be something interesting." Something related to her case, Will thinks, reading between the lines.

"Well," Will says. "I've already got tea, so I suppose it's time for a tea party."

Abigail mutters something about how she's not six, but she takes the mug Hannibal grabs from her for the cupboard. It's awkward, all of them standing around the kitchen, but as Abigail retreats back upstairs after depositing her empty mug in the sink, Will smiles. It's progress, at least.

The chill of the morning starts to soak in through her jacket as she sits there, keeping perfectly still, gun held firmly in her hands. The metal has long since been warmed by her skin. Her dad at her side deer blind, Abigail watches the doe lean down and chew at the grass. When she shuffles over, trying to steady herself to get a clearer shot, the doe raises its head, looking around the clearing in a feeble attempt to find predators. She sniffs the air, too, but Abigail knows her nose won't find anything. Dad taught her better than that.

"Whenever you're ready," he whispers, his own gun held loosely in his hands, safety on and barrel empty. When they first started hunting, he would prep his gun for every shot in case she missed and he needed to finish the kill. Now, she's been hunting for long enough that if she misses, she goes after the deer herself, climbs out of the blind and revels in the chase.

Her breathing rhythm is the most important thing right now. Each inhale and exhale unsteadies her hands, altering the angle of her shot, and inside the blind, it's much harder to tell the direction and speed of the wind, another complication to keep in mind.

When the doe stops moving, she stops breathing, waiting for the right moment. She lines up the shot and takes one deep breath in, letting the air out slowly, and then she pulls the trigger.

Gunfire rings through the woods, frightening birds and squirrels and piercing the chest of the doe. She crumples to the ground, her legs an awkward tangle beneath her. After a moment's pause, Abigail lets herself moving, standing up and climbing out of the deer blind with her dad.

"Good shot," he tells her as they head down the hill toward the body. Fog obscures the woods around them, and it would have scared her, when she first started hunting. Now, 18-years-old and almost ready to head off to college, the worry of what might lie beyond her sight is the least of her worries.

Coming upon body, she kneels down, closing the doe's eyelids. Then, her fingers dig into the fur of her neck, the skin warm through the cloth of her gloves. They won't take a photo with their kill; her father instilled in her a respect of the dead that would not allow it. Instead, they wrap a rope around her neck so they can tie her up.

"She was so pretty," Abigail says, running her hands over the fur again, taking stock of her. When she hangs in the air, her body stretched out, she looks more human.

"She is so pretty," her dad corrects her, and she rolls her eyes. "Deer are complex emotional creatures. Their beauty exists even in death."

"I read they're like the equivalent of a 4-year-old," she says. As they talk, they begin pulling out the tools they'll need to field dress her. When they bring it back home, her mom will make deer sausage while Abigail and her dad will make jerky. For now, they just need to get her to the cabin.

"They're smarter than a that, Abs."

"So I just shot a smart 4-year-old," she jokes, feeling along the sternum to decide where to make the cut. The knife goes in smoothly as she does, sliding through the flesh and running it

all the way down. It’s a nerve-wracking process; nick an organ, ruin the meat. With the chest cavity open, they can pull the organs out. Mom isn’t willing to cook them and Abigail isn’t willing to eat them, so they take them out and leave them on the ground for the scavengers to eat. Another part of the circle of life.

“A prodigy deer?”

“Dad, I could’ve killed the deer that was gonna solve global warming.”

“Don’t tell your mother.”

Abigail stares into the body for a moment, into the space where organs were and now is only nothingness, everything that gives life has removed.

They load the deer onto the front of the truck and tie her down. Everything else they need to do will be done at the cabin, because all the supplies are there.

“They’re a lot like us,” she says as they both climb inside. “They care about each other, their environment.” She pauses. “I know we’ll honor her, but sometimes I wish we didn't hunt. That we could have bone knives and deer meat without killing her.”

“None of her will go to waste,” he reminds her, "and deer aren't capable of controlling their own population. We've pushed out all their natural predators. That means we have to be the predators." Abigail nods as they pull back onto the main road, back onto the gravel and into the morning sun.

Now that she’s getting ready to go to college, her dad has all but stopped taking her with him on hunting trips. Every time they both go he seems to have a good time, so Abigail doesn’t think she’s done anything. There’s nothing to explain the difference in their schedules. It’s hard not to wonder.

She doesn’t have the time to worry about it once they get back to the cabin. Between skinning the deer and harvesting the meat, they’re busy for the next few hours. They’ll sleep upstairs in the antler room tonight and finish removing and cleaning the skeleton tomorrow.

Abigail lets herself forget about the change in their hunting schedule, but that can only last so long.

At twenty minutes before the start of class, the room should be empty. The coffee Hades made him this morning is still warm in his hand, his ridiculously fancy coffee machine sitting on Will’s kitchen counter and Abigail in his car on her way to Baltimore, where Will is going to meet them after work. They’re going to start looking at houses tomorrow morning, the entire weekend ahead of them, and with any luck, they’ll have closed on a place in Alexandria by Friday.

Hannibal’s insistence that he move his practice surprised Will. Even if money was no object for both of them, Hades valued consistency. A break in his routine was a big jump, so out of

character Will is certain it comes from an unwillingness to be too far from his husband. After so long apart, they've each noticed how clingy they are now.

He pauses in the entrance of the lecture hall, taking his glasses out of his bag and putting them on. They're purely aesthetic, something Will uses to avoid eye contact when he talks to his students, making himself seem far more timid than he is. It's a habit that's distinctly Will Graham, something to separate him from Persephone. As he enters the room, he's surprised to find it full of students. He drops hi briefcase and them their tact, a sea of clapping beginning.

"Thank you," he bites, rolling his eyes. As if killing someone should earn him applause. "Stop that right now."
The room falls silent, and Will basks in it as he pulls out his laptop. In a matter of seconds, the power point he prepared for today is up on the screen. Will dims the lights as Hobbs's resignation letter fills the screen.

"This is how I caught Garret Jacob Hobbs. It's his resignation letter. Anybody see the clue?" Hands fly into the air, a sparse number of them from all sides of the room. He looks them over before ignoring them.

"There isn't one. He wrote a letter, left his phone number, but no address. That's it."

With a click, Will goes to the next slide. He turns to look at it, at Hobbs's body splayed on the floor against the cabinets. His stomach turns at the sight, knowing he created the scene, his fingers pulled the trigger and bullets shot from his gun through flesh.

"Bad bookkeeping and dumb luck."

For a moment, Will isn't in the lecture hall. Will is in the kitchen, watching Hobbs's wife Louise fall to the ground. The bullets tear through him, blood trickling out of the wounds and staining his shirt as he falls. His head lolls for a second, but he has enough time to look back at Will.

"See?" he hisses before his body goes limp.

The kitchen dissolves.

"Garret Jacob Hobbs is dead," Will forces through gritted teeth. "The question is how to stop those his story is going to inspire."

The next slide is Cassie Boyle, splayed over the rack of antlers, the sun shining through the field behind her. It almost looks like a painting.

"He's already got one admirer," Will says, and the lecture continues on without hallucinations.

After class, the students walk out and Alana in. After a few seconds of cold shoulder, the students give up trying to talk to him, and Alana makes her way to stand next to him. She waits until the room is empty to speak.

“How are you, Persephone?” she asks, and she actually sounds concerned when she says it. Will smiles at her.

“I have no idea. Good, I guess?”

“That may change.” Demeter pauses a second before continuing. “I didn’t want you to be ambushed—”

“Is this an ambush?”

Demeter cringes.

“Ambush is later. Immediately later, soon to now. When Jack arrives, consider yourself ambushed.”

Zeus walks in, then.

“Here’s dad.”

“How was class?” Zeus asks.

“They applauded. It was inappropriate.” She stands there, arms crossed over her chest as her clothes are suddenly too big, her feet swimming in her shoes. “Shit.”

“Don’t bother to change on our account,” Zeus tells her. “And the review board begs to differ. You’re up for a commendation, and they okayed active return to the field.”

“That was the deal, wasn’t it? I come and work with you, and in return I get Hades back early?”

Zeus shakes his head.

“That deal was really only for the Shrike. We didn’t have a lead, and it would have risked too many lives to wait until we had one.”

“Basically, you don’t have to go back if you don’t want to,” Demeter adds, but it all feels suspicious. If he doesn’t go back, Zeus has the authority to send Hades back to the Underworld. And now that Abigail is counting on them, Persephone can’t let that happen.

“No, no. If there’s good I can do, I should do it. I’ll go back in the field. I have my anchor now, I’ll be fine.”

“Good,” Zeus replies. “Because I want you back in the field. The board wants a psychological evaluation, and then you’ll be good to go.”

“I’m related to one psychiatrist I know and married to the other. I’m also a few thousand years old. What psychiatrist could possibly give me a credible evaluation?”

“Hannibal’s,” Demeter answers, and this throws her for a loop. Her husband hadn’t mentioned that he was in therapy. There’s a HIPPA violation just in Demeter giving her this

information, probably. “She’s mortal, but she’s aware of our… situation. He began seeing her when he joined us on Earth to ease himself into the realm.”

“The Overworld,” Persephone corrects without thinking. “We call up here the Overworld. It was a joke we had.

“I’m not going to be comfortable with anyone inside my head” she continues, “but if she can handle Hannibal’s crazy, she can handle mine.” Persephone tries to sound less sarcastic than a thirteen-year-old, but her mother brings out the petulant child in her.

“You may be married to the King of the Underworld, but you’ve never killed anyone, Persephone. You’ve always been opposed to playing God, and in a way, you have now. That’s a lot to digest.”

Persephone rolls her eyes.

“I used to work homicide, and as you mentioned, my husband is basically the Grim Reaper. My stomach can handle it.”

“The reason you ‘used to’ work homicide is you couldn’t stomach pulling the trigger. You just pulled the trigger ten times!”

Persephone stills, her hands moving to grip the edge of the desk. Leaning onto it, she looks past Zeus, and she’s not pretending to avoid eye contact now.”

“So the psych eval isn’t a formality?”

"It's so I can get some sleep at night. I asked you to get close to Hobbs; I need to know you didn't get too close. Abigail Hobbs is currently living with you, so I'd say my concern there isn't unfounded."

"Therapy doesn't work on us," Persephone says, but that argument is weak.

"Therapy doesn't work on you because you won't let it. It obviously works on Hades." Zeus is trying not to raise his voice, Persephone can tell, but he’s never controlled his volume well.

"I know all the tricks." Even weaker a defense.

Demeter jumps in, then.

“Dr. Du Maurier is good at what she does, Will. She may not know what you went through, but she can help you understand and work through it. Why don’t you have a conversation with her?”

Persephone doesn’t say anything. Instead, she pushes off the desk, grabs his bag, and starts walking out of the lecture hall.

“I need my beauty sleep, Will!” Jack calls out after him, and he spares a moment to think that now is a weird time for his father to be invested in his mental health.

Then again, he supposes, Will is useful to him now, and Jack knows he has something Will wants.

The smell of roasted beans permeates the room when they walk in, Hannibal holding the door as Abigail and Will file in first. In Minnesota, Will imagines people who stare at them. Abigail's family photos are still plastered over the evening news, played next to interviews of her friend Marissa as she implies Hobbs's only way of talking to these girls was using Abigail, so she must be complicit in his crimes, because of how much time they spent together.

He orders his coffee on autopilot, not protesting as Hannibal pays for it all, leaving him to wait for their drinks at the counter. He's too busy try to think of the most delicate way to break the news. At a table in the corner, they both sit down. Abigail is nervous, seemingly unwilling to break the silence.

Other people talking in the shop create enough background noise to hide their conversation, and the roaster running right behind them and the steaming of milk only add to the security. Looking her in the eye, Will takes a deep breath.

"Abigail, Jack thinks you're an accomplice. We know he's right."

He watches as she freezes in her seat, hands grabbing the edge of the table like she's getting ready to bolt. Will reaches out and puts his hand over hers.

"You don't have to run. We know you didn't have a choice, and we're going to protect you. None of this is your fault."

For a moment, she sits there, eyes blank. Then Hannibal is there, setting drinks down and smiling.

"I thought you would wait for me, before you broke the news," he says, laughing a little as he looks between the two of them. "Abigail, everything will be fine. You don't have to worry."

"Why should I trust you?" she asks. "How do I know you're not wearing a wire, or something?"

"You don't have to," Will says. "You can absolutely decide not to trust us. Walk away right now and try to settle everything and avoid suspicion on your own." He pauses, taking another drink and twirling his wedding ring. It's the plain gold band, today, the original ring at home in his jewelry drawer, waiting until Persephone can wear it again.

"But," he continues, "if you choose to trust me, you'll have someone on the inside of the case who can help you cover your tracks. In exchange for you trusting us, you'll have intimate knowledge of me also doing something illegal. Collateral, if you will."

They're all quiet as Abigail stares behind the bar, watching the baristas move around each other as they grab pastries from the case and call out completed drinks. Hannibal grabs Will's

free hand, running his thumb over the back and smiling as Will turns to look at him. It's warm and fond, his eyes crinkling around the edges and his mouth tilting up the slightest amount.

"All right," Abigail says, claiming their attention. "I only helped with the last four. He wanted me to get their numbers so I could pretend to ask them questions about the schools. I would give the numbers to him, and he would never tell me what happened, but I would remember their names enough to know that something was wrong when they all went missing.

"I'm glad he's dead," she mutters. "Is that bad?"

"No," Will whispers. "I'm glad he's dead, too."

And just like that, they move on to other topics of conversation. It's a small piece that Abigail has chosen to share with them, and Will refuses to push.

Instead, they talk about the houses Will and Hannibal are planning to look at over the weekend, Abigail's plans for Yale, and begin what Will feels is the first of many debates about which is superior; hunting or fishing.

It's the sixth college they've visited, and Abigail grows more weary each time. She's already started her enrollment paperwork for Yale; her mom signs everything and helped her fill out her FAFSA as a formality, even though she won't be taking any aid money outside of her scholarships.

That's why she never comes on any of the visits; if she stays at home, she can fill out more of the forms in secret, be sure to erase the browser history and hide everything under her bad before they get home, so dad can live under the illusion a little longer.

This time, they're at St. Catherine University. It's a Catholic school, which Abigail likes in theory, but the school is so small it would suffocate her.

Still, everyone they talk to is incredibly polite. When they look at her transcript, the counselor seems enthusiastic, but their budget is small. The most they could offer her in scholarships is half of their tuition, leaving Abigail $20,000 short before room and board. It's a lot more loans than she wants to take out, and that's ignoring all the other problems the school has.

"What d'you think, Abs?" Dad asks as they're walking across the small quad. Students are milling about here and there, bright, vibrant women, their faces full of smiles despite the gloomy weather. They look happy, like they jumped right out of the brochure.

"I don't know, dad," she says. "It's a lot of money. I really don't want to come out of undergrad with $100k of debt, especially since I have a master degree to think about."

He turns to her a second, frowning before joining her in staring at the students. Sitting in the corner of the quad, a girl has headphones in, oblivious to the world around her. Dad follows her gaze, and then he stops walking and grabs her arm.

“I want you to talk to her,” he says. “I want you to befriend her. Get her number, say you have questions about the school.” She pauses, letting his words sink in.

“Uh-”

“Now,” he adds, his voice harsher.

“Okay.” His grip on her arm is painful, and Abigail just nods mutely.

Her name is Regina Michaels, and she goes missing the weekend after they return from the visit, while her dad’s on a hunting trip. He comes back with meat, so Abigail ignores her suspicions.

But then it happens again, and her name is Trisha George. At some point, Abigail forces herself to stop remembering the names. It’s less painful that way.

The trees around Dr. du Maurier’s house are already barren, early snow on the ground and icicles hanging from the gutters. The exterior walls are tan stone, expensive and tasteful, broken up by floor to ceiling windows. It’s beautiful and immaculate, and already, Persephone hates it. This is a house straight out of a catalog, hardly a home.

Unsure of where to park, Persephone pulls into the driveway. Hannibal would, and so it feels like a safe assumption that she should as well.

Climbing out of the car, Persephone walks up the stairs and knocks on the door. She toys with her wedding ring as she waits for Dr. du Maurier to come to the door. It’s hard to keep down the small bit of jealousy she feels, knowing this is the sort of woman people expected Hannibal to marry. She’s elegant, she doesn’t fish, doesn’t own so many dogs her husband had to bribe her to trim the number down, doesn’t come home with dirt under her nails more often than not.

If three thousand years couldn’t soften Hades’ love for her, a mortal wouldn’t, either.

Dr. du Maurier opens the door as Persephone is lost in thought, the chill slowly seeping in through her jacket. She looks far younger than her 62 years would suggest.

“William Graham. It’s a pleasure to finally meet Hannibal’s other half. Please, come in.” She steps back, her heels clicking against the tile of the entry way. They’re nice shoes, and she briefly wonders how much they cost. Persephone takes off her coat, hanging it on the rack as directed, and looks at herself in the mirror along the foyer.

Her hair is tied in a loose braid, falling over her shoulder and hanging onto her chest, obscuring the pattern on her sweater. The jeans she’s wearing are old, something she purchased almost a decade ago, and they’re only holding together so well because she hardly

ever gets to wear them. Her boots are new. Hades bought them for her, because the few pieces of women's clothing she owned hadn't included a pair of shoes suitable for the weather. They have a small heel, but nothing that would cause her to stumble.

"It's curious you showed up this way. Should I call you Persephone, or Will Graham?"

"Persephone, please," she says hurriedly. "Sorry, I'll admit I'm nervous. The witch trials weren't kind to me, and after I changed bodies I spent a good period in a mental institution in the 1780s."

"All of your power, and you allowed yourself to be institutionalized?" Persephone can't tell if there's disdain or curiosity in her voice.

"At the time, it was easier than dealing with my mother. She was less than thrilled to suddenly have a son."

Dr. du Maurier smiles a bit at this, leading her into a room that obviously designed for seeing patients, despite her status as retired. The floor to ceiling windows that Persephone noticed from outside light the room and two chairs face each other. Taking the seat closest to the windows, she waits for Persephone to sit down before taking a piece of paper off the table next to her and signing the bottom.

"What's that?"

"Your psychological evaluation," Dr. du Maurier tells her, handing it over. "Garret Jacob Hobbs didn't destroy you. Your father can rest easily knowing he didn't ruin his daughter's mind, and we can discuss the things I actually care about free from other obligations."

"Hobbs isn't what you actually care about?"

"I'm uninterested in what Hobbs did to you. I didn't sign your evaluation preemptively because I wanted to discuss your trauma without affecting your career. I signed it because the trauma you received is minimal. Garret Jacob Hobbs is your victim. You killed him. You've certainly dealt with worse."

Persephone pauses, leaning back in her chair and tugging at her braid. The direction of this conversation is beginning to make her uncomfortable. With the paperwork already in her hand, she could stand up and walk out the door, climb in the car and go back to her husband. But she needs to correct Dr. du Maurier first.

"Hobbs wasn't my victim."

"What do you consider him, then?"

"I consider him dead."

Dr. du Maurier takes a second to let her words process.

"Killing Hobbs was merely part of the job?"

She scoffs.

“If you’re trying to ask if I enjoyed killing Hobbs, you can. I’m not a tea cup, Dr. du Maurier, I won’t break if you rough me up a little.”

As she regards Persephone, her head tilts.

“I don’t need to ask you that, Persephone. It’s obvious you did. The man killed eight mirror images of yourself; eight girls you couldn’t save. When you relived the murder of Elise Nichols, you should have seen yourself in the killer’s place, but you could see both. It confused you. Killing Hobbs gave you a chance to take revenge for them. Just as Abigail was one of his victims, you felt like you were, too. Aren’t you glad he’s dead?”

Without a word, Persephone gathers her wits and her things. Even if leaving lets her know she’s right, Persephone won’t say those words out loud. Dr. du Maurier doesn’t deserve the satisfaction.

Black is his favorite color. It reflects the least amount of light, makes hiding in the dark corners easier, can create an empty space to exist in and to clear her head.

Shooting a gun is much the same way. Looking down the range, Will lines up the shot. His feet are firm on the ground, and his breaths are even. The sight is right at the heart. He pulls the trigger and lets himself inhale, his mind blissfully blank.

“I’m pretty sure firearm accuracy isn’t a prerequisite for teaching,” Beverly says as she walks into the range, startling Will again.

“I’ve been in the field before,” he replies after gathering his wits, not sure if it’s a defense or an explanation. In a way, he considers it might be both.

He looks down the range, staring at the target. It’s not close enough to the center to please him.

“So now you’re back in the saddle?” She pauses. “Ish?”

“Ish, indeed.” With a groan, Will slides out the empty clip and sets his gun on the counter. “It took me ten shots to drop Hobbs.” Looking at the target again, Will thinks it might take even more, now. How did he managed to get worse in the last few weeks?

“Zeller wanted to give you the bullets he pulled out of Hobbs in an acrylic case, but I told him you wouldn’t think it was funny.” Using the switch, Will pulls the target back towards himself and takes it down.

“Probably not,” Will tells her. Hannibal might have tried to put it on his mantle, and that would have been hard to explain to guests. As he clips the target up, he tries to imagine how Hannibal would do it. Imagines people in stuffy clothing trying to understand it all. Or maybe he would keep it in the window sill, another sweet reminder.

“I suggested he turn them into a Newton’s Cradle. You know, one of those clinking, swinging ball things.” Will laughs.

“Now that, that would be funny.” He puts on his ear protection, picking up his gun again and loading a fresh magazine, looking down the range. He lines up a shot before Beverly has a chance to reply, and whether it’s his haste or his aim, he misses the target completely, barely clipping the bottom.

“Why do you use the Weaver stance?” Beverly asks, moving closer. “I would have taken you for an isosceles guy.”

“I have a rotator cuff issue, so I have to use the Weaver stance.” Beverly’s hand comes to up to his shoulder, then, pressing down lightly.

“You are tight,” she says, taking a step back.

“I got stabbed when I was a cop.”

This is true, Will thinks, but it’s not where most of his shoulder issues come from. Beverly doesn’t need to know the whole truth, in this case.

Lost in thought, he only hears the tail end of what she’s saying.

“No lead in a pencil,” he tells her. “It’s graphite.”

This appears to be an appropriate response, because she gives a small snort of laughter.

“Now you tell me.” Beverly reaches up to adjust his left elbow. “See if that helps with the recoil.”

He's shocked to find that it does. It isn't that he expected Beverly to give him bad advice; she’s a field agent and a scientist. With each shot he gets closer to the target.. After he finishes firing and brings the target back, he looks at Beverly.

“You the new firearms instructor?”

Beverly shakes her head.

“No. Jack sent me to ask what you know about gardening.”

She Gets Everything She Wants (When She Gets Me Alone)

Chapter Summary

Will stares at mushrooms, then at Hobbs. Abigail asks questions, Hannibal reassures, and a house is decided upon. Hades and Jack confront Athena about her meddling, and Bedelia has a session with both Persephone and danger.

Chapter Notes

I'm not happy with this chapter, but after the amount of working on it I've done, I dont think I ever will be, so you're stuck with it as is. The next chapter should be up sometime in January, unless I'm capable of writing it more quickly than I did this one, between work and the vacation I have planned.

Hannibal's voice is a nightmare to get right; have mercy if I didn't quite hit the mark at all times.

“Gardening? Why would Jack ask about that?”

Will begins breaking down his gun, making sure the chamber is clear before putting each piece away in his case separately. Even if a bullet couldn’t kill him, a misfire due to improper firearm handling could kill any mortal on the campus.

“We’ve got bodies lined like crops. Jack already left for the scene; he told me you’d need a ride, so he sent me down to fetch you instead of calling.”

Just like that, Will can breath again. Despite his fears, Beverly isn’t a messenger for his mother disguised as something inane. It’s just another case that his opinion is needed on.

“My husband dropped me off today,” Will explains. “We’re looking to move to Alexandria, so he’s speaking to a real estate agent while I’m at work.” A smile grows on Beverly’s face as Will closes his case and lets her lead the way. “What?”

“And just like that, the spouse of Professor Graham goes from hushed gossip to a fact known around Quantico. Leaves your students wondering what changed.”
Beverly doesn’t know that Abigail is living with them. Doesn’t know that they’re gods who’ve just been reconnected, either. A lie is really his only option. It feels like it’s the only choice he’s had, lately.

“Hannibal and I have lived apart for most of our marriage,” he explains. “I was resistant to moving to a big city, and he would have been unhappy living in the middle of nowhere. We loved each other, but neither of us were willing to compromise and hurt our careers, so we didn’t.” He pauses as they climb into the elevator. Beverly has given him all her attention, and it’s an unsettling feeling, given that he’s making a story up. “We’re both getting too old to be driving hours to see each other, though. He’s willing to move his practice in Baltimore and I’m willing to live in a moderately-sized city.”

“And that’s it?”

“That’s it.”

Once they’re in Beverly’s car, she tries to get more details out of him, but Will keeps his lips sealed. Already he’s given enough detail, and it’s likely Hannibal will be disappointed he didn’t get to create a more elaborate, dramatic story for them. Instead, Will asks about Beverly, learns about her sister who’s always sleeping on her couch and her tabby cat named Marco, who suffers through the various costumes Beverly puts him in. Will is assured he’ll see photos later.

As they pull through the woods, coming to stop by a row of black SUV’s identical to the one they’re in, he watches EMTs placing a body wrapped in black plastic onto the gurney. Will climbs out of the car first, looking for Jack in the crowd. The dead are always patient, a gift his father has never had.

They don’t exchange greeting. Instead, Will and Jack slip under the police tape before Jack turns to him.

“Bedelia sent over your psych eval this morning. Maybe therapy does work on you.”

“Therapy is a taste I have yet to acquire, but it got me back in the field, just like you wanted.” It’s not a neat dismissal, and Jack is sure to take note of it, but he lets the conversation move on.

“Local police found animal traps in the woods and pesticide nearby. All that’s missing is a scarecrow.” With a huff of laughter, Will runs a hand through his hair, glad he left his sport coat at Quantico. The chill bothers him, the FBI windbreaker he’s wearing instead, but dirtying his one good coat would be a fate worse than the cold.

“Didn’t want his fields disturbed.”

“They’re all in different stages of decay,” Price says as he walks up to them both. “Buried in compost, probably an attempt to encourage decomposition. It’s a patient way to get rid of a body.” They all turn to look at the bodies. Each of them is covered in slowly growing fungus that seems to have eased some of the small of decay, just as the open air has allowed it to dissipate. “Zeller says they lived a few days, for a given definition of living. Plus, their faces are all too far gone for a positive ID; we’ll need to use dental records.”

“They had IVs,” Zeller adds as he joins the group. “He was giving them something, but I won’t know what until I can run some tests.”

“And they weren’t restrained?” Will asks, glancing over as another body is put onto the gurney and carried away. “Nothing to keep them from crawling out?”

“Just dirt.”

With a wave of his hand, Jack clears the scene. The EMTs go to wait by the ambulance and everyone else goes to stand together and discuss their ideas, all of them waiting for Will to come back and either confirm or deny them. He feels almost like a fortune teller as he comes to crouch in front of the remaining bodies, closing his eyes and breathing. There’s no need to count down this time; his eyes flutter open on their own.

There are five bodies in the grave before him, the mushrooms pushed farther back, and he can feel burlap on his hands as he sets the last body in by the others. Cold, thin plastic as he lines up the oxygen tube and tapes it over the man’s mouth and inserts the IV.

The man he chose is unconscious. He won’t know he’s dying, both a blessing and a curse. He will feel no pain but also will live no more. There’s no emotion as he shovels dirt onto the body, not even excitement. This is neither a crime of passion nor a crime of rage; it is simply a crime, a fact of his life.

Garret Jacob Hobbs stares back at him as Will shovels again and again. The lines between him and the killer begin to blur, his heart begins to race. He leans down, as if hoping to wipe Hobbs away, but when he next blinks, the body is covered in mold again, just as if was before he began reenacting the crime.

A hand grabs his, dirt and mold and flesh and mushrooms holding him weakly, and Will screams as he falls backward from his crouch, crawling away as EMTs rush forward. Jack comes to him, places a comforting hand on his shoulder before helping Will up.

Trying to distract himself from whatever happened, he stares out over the small crowd of people that have gathered outside the police baricade, trying to get a first person view of the crime scene.

A fiery head of hair catches his eyes as he does. Focusing on it, Will finds a familiar face staring back at him, locking their gazes.

Athena is a problem he’ll have to worry about later. Hobbs’ blank eyes still stare at him when he closes his own and a limp grasp on his hand has left a mark darker than any bruise.

“You all right?” Beverly asks, concern clear in her voice and her furrowed brow. Will waves her off while forcing a smile.

“Just another day in paradise,” he says. “You know how it is.”

The look she gives him as she walks away stays him all the way back to Wolf Trap.

His house was never been perfect, Will thinks as he stares up at it from outside. The windows always let in too much winter air and the front door always creaks when it’s opened, waking

the dogs. The roof in the upstairs bathroom leaks when it rains too much, and the back door doesn't open unless handled with the utmost care.

His house was never designed to be a permanent residence; Will moved into the house when he took the job at Quantico. Every year tried to convince himself he should move closer to work. Each time, the practicality of staying in the same place won over the convenience of a shorter commute; if he was going to live forever, the amount of time he spent driving didn't matter nearly as much. There were mortals who drove an hour and a half one way for work; they were the crazy ones.

Still, stepping onto the porch and running his hand along the whitewashed columns, he'll miss this house. It was never quite a home, too quiet and calm even with all the dogs, but it was as close. It only needed Hannibal.

Hannibal. How strange it feels to call his husband that. For so long during their time apart, Will all but doodled his name in notebooks and drew hearts around it, and now, he had a whole new name to use.

When he opens the door, only Winston and Elizabeth greet him, their tails wagging.

Seeing the house with most of its furry residents missing is foreign to him as calling Hades by another name. But sacrifices had to made, and Persephone was excellent at striking a bargain, even with his own husband. Hades promised to welcome Abigail with open arms if he kept only one dog. Unable to choose between the two, he gave Hannibal the power to chose the city they would move to in exchange for both of the dogs currently barking at him. The others were taken in by a handful of his neighbors, many of them all to happy to help keep his pack around.

It takes a minute to calm the two down, making their youth obvious as they try to paw at his chest, standing on hind legs as if they might reach his face to lick it.

"Not now," he laughs, trying to make it to the kitchen to feed them and failing miserably. "Down," he bites after a moment, thankful they obey.

They eat as Will packs a bag, clothes enough for the weekend he and the dogs will be spending in Baltimore. The bookshelves in the living room are empty, instead blocked by piles of boxes, and all of his pots and pans are gone, donated along with pieces of furniture here and there. Anything that he wouldn't need before the move was given to somebody else. His piano was going to the local high school for a practice room and his bed was going to a halfway house in DC.

Abigail had elected to stay with Hannibal until they made the move to Alexandria, setting herself up in one of the guest rooms and spending most of her time in Hannibal's office or exploring the city. She'd started sending Will photos of dogs she'd seen, asking him to rate them and always amused when his ratings were often more than 10 out of 10.

It was strange how quickly she had meshed her way into their lives. Part of it was survival instincts, he and Hannibal agreed. Should a wrongful death suit go poorly, Abigail would

likely be left with nothing. Her scholarships were great, but there was more to worry about than just her years of college.

If she was merely looking for a substitute family until she got her feet on the ground, Will was ready to be that. If she was just looking for people trying to make sure she didn't go to jail, Will could do that, too. Hannibal would follow along in whatever he wanted; all Abigail had to do was decide.

The dogs rush into Hannibal's house before him, forcing him to drop their leashes, lest they pull him over in their excitement. Abigail is sitting on the couch in Hannibal's living room, a book held loosely in her hands. Flames in the fire place hold her attention more closely, until Winston jumps up next to her.
"You're here early," she says, a small smile on her face.

"Don't tell Hannibal; I sped the whole way here."

"I heard that," his husband says as he walks into the room, taking a look at Winston on the furniture and sighing in defeat. "And I don't approve of your cavalier attitude with the law." In direct opposition to his own words, Hannibal grabs Will's hand, giving him a quick kiss.

Taking this as a cue, Abigail ushers the dogs outside, laughing under her breath and mumbling something neither of them hear.

"I'm glad I found the time to come up," Will says as they head into the kitchen, where Hannibal has obviously begun prepping to cook dinner. Vegetables sit chopped on the cutting board and meat is thawing in the sink. "I have some concerns."

"About what?"

"Bedelia's effort to clear me for the field may have been premature."

Hannibal's brows furrow and he sits up in his seat, setting his book down.

"They'll revoke her rubber stamp."

"Maybe that should," Will says with a bitter laugh.

Always able to see through him, Hannibal redirects.

"What did you see, out in the field?"

Will shoots a look at the back door, barely able to see Abigail through the frosted window. She's far enough away that it's safe to crack open the subject, but they'll need to talk quickly.

"Hobbs."

"An association?"

“A hallucination.” Pausing, the words he needs seem to hang just out of his reach. It’s hard to find the right phrasing, to decide how to say it all without making himself sound even more insane. “I saw him lying there in someone else’s grave.”

Standing, Hannibal comes to grab his hand, pulling him close.

“Did you tell Jack what you saw?”

“No.”

“It’s stress,” Hannibal says, kissing the top of his head. “If it continues, we’ll be concerned, but until then, I think it’s best you put the incident out of your mind. Dwelling on it will likely only increase the issue.”

Abigail comes back in just as Hannibal is wrapping up his thought, and they let the conversation die. It’s something they can continue talking about later, when Abigail is asleep, or hidden away in her room ignoring them and allowing herself to decompress from the strange situation in which she now finds herself.

When she comes back downstairs, Hannibal puts her to work, not giving her a chance to stand awkwardly in the corner as she has before. Abigail takes her role seriously, even as she cracks terrible jokes, and Will resigns himself to dish duty after they eat. He’s just glad to see Abigail smiling wide and talking with Hannibal about her mother, on a his of sadness in her eyes.

Will drinks his wine in the background until they eat. For a dinner between the three of them, it’s almost normal, a true miracle, just in time for the start of December and the beginning of the Christmas season.

As he starts in on the dishes after dinner, Abigail vanishes upstairs with a book again and Hannibal leans against the counter to keep him company.

“Tell me more about the scene where you saw Hobbs. You said he was in someone else’s grave?”

“I thought I wasn’t supposed to think about it?”

“Don’t think about Hobbes. I was asking about the killing itself.” He pauses, pouring himself a glass of scotch, and a second one for Will. They don’t get drunk easily, but that has never stopped them or the other gods from trying.

“It was a mushroom kingdom, almost,” Will tells him. “The bodies were buried, their arms sticking out with IVs feeding them something and tubes down their throats so they could breath.” He shrugs, rinsing a few of the clean dishes. The more time spent dwelling on the strangeness of the case, the further to the back of his mind Hobbes seems to fade.

“The arms. Why did he leave them exposed? Perhaps he wanted to hold their hands, feel the life leaving their bodies?”

Shaking his head, Will pauses. His hands come to rest on the edge of the kitchen sink, the cool metal against his palms serving to ground him.

“That’s too esoteric for someone who took the time to bury his victims in a straight line. He’s more practical, analytical.” Will turns to Hannibal. “He doesn’t appreciate symbolism the same way you do.”

“A shame,” he replies. “Was he cultivating them?”

It’s something to think on, certainly. Just like a garden, the killer made attempts to keep them alive. In the end, though, he failed.

“If so, he might not be cut out for horticulture. Our farmer let all his crops die. The one that was still alive died on the way to the hospital.”

“What would they be, if not crops?”

Will pauses. One of Hannibal’s many gifts is the way he forces Will to think, to view his problems from different angles and see how they might be changed by different lenses.

“They were the fertilizer. The mushrooms the bodies were covered in were the crops.”

Hannibal sets down his glass and coming to wraps his arms around Will’s waist. It distracts him for a moment as he leans into the embrace, but then the dishes call his name and he continues, waiting for Hannibal’s reply.

“Mycelium kill forests over and over, building deeper soil to grow larger and larger trees.” Hannibal lays a kiss on Will’s neck, nibbling on his ear. Another one of his husband’s skills is coming to the front of Will’s mind, now; the gift he has for distraction. It’s a fight to stay on topic, to follow the line of conversation while still cleaning.

“If it were just about the soil, why bother keeping the victim’s alive?”

“The structure of a fungus mirrors that of the human brain. An intricate web of connections.”

Oh, the ways Will could like to connect with Hannibal, right now.

“Maybe he admires their ability to connect the way human minds can’t,” Will says, his voice gaining a breathless quality. He can feel Hannibal’s chest shaking as he laughs.

“Yours can,” he whispers in Will’s ear.

“Not physically,” he replies, turning around in Hannibal’s arms and digging wet hands into the starched, iron fabric of his shirt. Hannibal doesn’t seem to notice the way his shirt is dampened, tightening his own hold in return. “Not with any sort of reciprocity.”

“Is that what your farmer is looking for? Some sort of connection?”

Even Hannibal seems to have lost the plot of their conversation by then, their faces drifting together until lips meet. They make their way upstairs as quietly as possible, trying to to

disturb Abigail only a few rooms over. When they fall onto his bed, Will accepts the fingers Hannibal slides between his lips gladly.

Keeping his mouth occupied is the only way to dull the screams of pleasure that are sure to follow.

On separate autopsy tables, each body lined up in the open space, mimicking their places in their graves. Sheets give some slight amount of modesty, but the smell still fills the space, telling of their true nature. The lavender oil under his nose does little to dampen the pungent odor.

It's coincidence that he's alone in the room, walking around the space and trying to glean something, anything about these poor souls. But unlike the body of Elise Nichols, unlike Hobbs in the grave, there are no hallucinations. There are no clue to help and horrify him, not that any of his previous visions have actually aided him.

Beverly enters the room first, Price and Zeller following behind. None of them seem surprised that he arrived before them. If anything, they act as if they were expecting it.

"Dextrose in all of the catheters," Beverly says, setting one of the bags on the side of one an autopsy table.

"Not the smartest guy, then," Price says. "Dextrose is a terrible way to keep someone alive."

"Smart enough to use some sort of dialysis after the circulatory system broke down," she points out.

"They were 'fertilized' with a highly concentrated mixture of hardwoods, newspaper, and pig poop. Perfect for growing mushrooms and other fungi," Price says.

"They all died of kidney failure, though," Zeller adds.

"Mushrooms love sugar water. They crave it, even." Price pauses. "As much as a mushroom can crave anything."

"So do recovering alcoholics," Zeller says. He turns to Price, then. "Nothing personal."

Price laughs.

"My love of sweets has nothing to do with my recovery status," he replies, and the conversation continues.

"Feed sugar to fungus in your body, the fungus makes alcohol," Zeller says. "But normally, recovering alcoholics are the ones preying on themselves." He winces, looking back to Price. "Sorry."

Price rolls his eyes, waving the comment away, and Will takes that as a cue to continue.

“Alcoholics aren’t the only ones with compromised endocrine systems.” Will takes a second to think, trying to put the pieces into place. Connecting clues is sometimes more akin to solving a puzzle than a crime. He thinks back to what Zeller said. “They all died of kidney failure?” Zeller nods. “Death by diabetic ketoacidosis.”

“We don’t know they’re diabetic,” Zeller says, and Will waves this away.

“They’re all diabetic. He induces a coma and puts them in the ground.”

Beverly isn’t bothering to suppress her smile, raising her eyebrows and tilting her head when Zeller looks her way. If Zeller was expecting back up from her, he’s obviously forgotten who he’s working with.

“How is he inducing diabetic comas?” she asks.

There’s only one logical answer.

“He changes their medication. He’ll have to be a doctor, then, or a pharmacist. Someone in a medical field.”

She follows his train of thought.

“He buries them, feed them sugar to keep them alive just long enough for the circulatory systems to soak it up,” she says.

“So he can feed the mushrooms,” Price says. Zeller chimes in next.

“We dug up his mushroom garden.”

Weight begins building in Will’s stomach, a pit of guilt that comes with the knowledge he now has. Another person’s life is at risk, even as they stand here talking about the case. Somewhere out their, the killer is planning his next crime, choosing his next victim.

“He’ll want to grow a new one.”

They all disperse, then, meeting over after a quick conversation about how to proceed. The other three will handle that, though; Will’s only other area of expertise is forensic entomology, and he picked that up to stave off boredom more than anything else.

Following him out the door, Beverly trots after him.

“Wait up,” she says, laughter in her voice a perfect foil to the way Will feels. He’s useless to move this case along, which he’s come to loathe after spending this long pretending to be a mortal. “I wanted to ask you something.”

“Something about the case?” he asks. “You should have done it in there; the answer might have sparked something with Price and Zeller.” But she shakes her head. Will is heading towards the elevators, and since Beverly seems to be following him, he hits the up button and assumes she’s heading with him almost mirroring their walk a week ago.

“It’s about your husband.” As if sensing the way Will starts to tense, she clarifies. “Not about him as a person. About how you knew you wanted to marry him.” Raising an eyebrow, Will leans against the elevator wall.

“Why the curiosity?”

Beverly lets out an almost embarrassed huff, another small smile on her face.

"Don’t tell anyone,” she mutters. “I’m trying to be kind of quiet about it, but I’m seeing someone. A civilian.” A pause. “She's a reporter. I can’t exactly ask Jack about these things, because he’s my boss, and besides him, you’re the only happily married person I know.”

The elevator door opens, and they both step out. Checking his watch, Will is glad to see his next class won’t start for another half an hour. Plenty of time to head to his office and finish this conversation.

“So your question is how I knew I wanted to marry Hannibal?”

“Yeah. How long had you been dating? And who asked. All the social norms get thrown out the window for us gays.”

Will feels badly, for a second, that he’s living such a lie. Beverly has no idea that he’s really Persephone, a goddess with unending time. That for so long, she resisted a different set of ancient societal roles.

But none of that will answer Beverly’s question.

“I knew when I first saw him,” Will answers truthfully. Better to get that out before he has to begin lying. “We were at a park, and I was sitting at a river bank, watching the water go by. I’d been especially anxious that day, and I’d needed the calm.

“He came up behind me, to ask if I was all right, and when I looked up at him, a peace came over me. I really can’t explain it better than that.” They step into his office, and Will closes the door behind them. “I told myself right there that I was going to marry him, no matter what.” Will laughs. “Because my body and my brain weren’t cooperating, I accidentally said it out loud, too. Thankfully, he found it charming.”

Beverly shoots a look his way, something wistful and dreamy, as if she’s imaging herself in the moment.

“It sounds nice, to be so sure,” Beverly says, her voice carrying almost a dream-like quality.

“More like terrifying,” Will tells her. “But tell me about this reporter.”

She hasn’t seen Hannibal in half a week. They’ve talked, of course; just earlier in the night, they sat on the phone for almost an hour, discussing the boring details of their days as an excuse to hear each other’s voices. Hannibal was even kind enough to ask after the dogs, as if

he actually cared about any animal beyond Cerberus. As with everything, Hades needed his pets to be like the people in his lives; he needed them to serve a purpose.

While they talked, Persephone tried on a few of her dresses. It was nice, to be able to feel the smooth fabric over her skin, to twirl in front of her mirror and watch the skirts flare around her. Even now, having changed on accident, she appreciates being able to sit still, feel the difference in the way her chest rises and falls and let the winter winds tug at the ends of her long hair. It was calming.

The evening settles in the same way the dogs are beginning to, both Winston and Elizabeth no longer bounding around the yard, rolling in the snow, but rather sitting with her on the porch, watching the occasional animal run across with interest but not taking the time or the effort to chase it. They'll head inside soon, get ready for bed and fall asleep, but Persephone has a double of whiskey in her right hand and is toying with the plain gold band on her left.

A car pulling up to the front of the house breaks her calm, and Will stands from his chair on the back porch, ushering the dogs inside before they can try and run around the house. Given that he isn't expecting visitors, and he lives in the middle of nowhere, a surprise guest raises the hair on the back of his neck. Next to the front door hangs his gun in its holster, and Will rests his hand on it as he watches the unfamiliar car come to a stop, headlights turning off and driver's door opening.

Abigail climbs out. Fear grips him for a moment, worried that something happened to Hannibal, but Jack would have called. Would have felt his brother's death in the disturbance of power. And besides, how does one kill the leader of the underworld? Surely it must be impossible.

Still, Will steps out onto the front porch, smiling.

"I didn't know I'd have company tonight," Will says, keeping his voice light. Abigail shrugs.

"Hannibal was going to the opera, and he said I could use his other car if I got bored." She pauses as she steps inside, taking off her coat and leaning dwon to under her boots before sliding them off. "Why aren't you with him?"

Will laughs.

"The opera isn't a place that I feel comfortable, in the same way that Hannibal isn't the type to go ice fishing with me on the weekends. I'd go if he asked, but he loves me enough not to."

Dropping down onto the couch, she shoots him a skeptical look. Will knows what's coming. There are question he'll need to answer, about the state of his relationship with Hannibal. For all that her father was a killer, Abigail's home life has always been conventional. Her mother worked, but for the most part, she took care of the home, while her father brought in a majority of the money and handled the bills.

It's not that they're both men that's giving Abigail trouble, Will knows. It's everything else.

“You guys are weird.” She pauses, resting her chin on the back of the couch. Winston settles next to her, and neither of them say anything for a moment. The silence drags on, tensing the muscles of his lower back as he waits for one of them to break it, and Will wishes he weren’t a part of it.

“I believe weird only begins to scratch the surface,” he settles on, sitting in a chair opposite the couch. “Should we discuss whatever seems to be bothering you?”

“It’s weird when you sound like him,” Abigail says. “When you’re think about Hannibal, or when you’re near him, it’s like you’re trying to mimic him. It feels like you’re trying to manipulate me.”

“Manipulation is the last thing on my mind,” Will promises. “Which I know is what I would say either way. You’ll have to trust that it’s the truth. I have a…” Will pauses, then, trying to decide the best way to explain his differences. “Let’s call it a mental defect. Psychologists argue that qualification, my husband included, but that’s the way I’ve always viewed it.

“The root of this defect is that I have extreme empathy. The exact nature of why is up for debate, and it’s something I’ve kept myself out of, because I don’t care about why. I know it can’t be fixed, and that’s all that matters.”

“What do you do with empathy?” Abigail asks. The question is valid, one he answers often during his classes.

“At work, I use it to see crimes scenes and other case details through the eyes of the killer, working my way backwards to tell me things about them that can help us catch them.” He pauses again. “It’s how I caught you father.”

“And that makes you talk like your husband?”

“It makes me talk like everyone,” Will says. “You’re not the first person to notice it. I try to think of it as an unfortunate, but amusing, side effect.”

Slowly, Abigail nods, and Will watches her face twitch as she takes in this information, processes it all and comes to understand.

“So the longer I’m around you, the more you’ll talk like me?”

Will nods.

“Absolutely,” he says. “Because that’s what everybody wants, is some old guy trying to sound cool by talking like a teenager.”

His comment has the intended effect. Abigail laughs, and after a moment where she seems to be thinking again, she looks back up.

“Why have you guys live apart for so long?”

“It wasn’t a good point in our careers for either of us to move. When we go married, Hannibal had just switched from surgery to psychiatry. He started seeing patients, and

eventually had enough that he could start his own practice, but none devoted to the point they might travel. I had been working on a doctorate while teaching classes at Quantico. The unfair thing to do might have been to ask one of us to put our careers on hold, but neither was willing to ask.

“At some point, we got used to living in different cities. While it was an unconventional relationship, we aren’t exactly conventional people.”

“So why move now?”

Like all her others, this is a perfectly fair question. To her, the timing must seem suspect. Having just taken her in, and they decide to find a permanent residence. Did she suspect they were attempting to convince her to join they’re family? It would, of course, be entirely true, but Will felt it was a little early to reveal their hand.

“I finished my doctorate earlier this year, and the lease on the building for Hannibal’s practice is up at the end of the month. He’s been looking around and found a building in Alexandria he’s signed a new lease on, after talking with me about it.” Will thinks back to the marriage license that Athena forged, trying to remember the year on it. “After being married for five years, we’ve decided to compromise.”

“That’s a long time to live apart,” Abigail says, but she soon loses interest in the topic, it seems. They talk more about how she’s keeping up on all the news back home, when she’d like to go retrieve the rest of her belongings. Will makes dinner, glad he took the time to go to the grocery store on his way home, and tries not to wonder if this is the last meal he’ll make in this house. Most of his belongings are already in storage.

Later this week, they’re going to see a house Hannibal claims Will is going to love. After the last two proved to be inadequate, he’s not holding his hopes too high, but that doesn’t mean he isn’t preparing. The move will be soon, and it will be swift. He’s already spoken to a realtor about putting his on the market, just as Hannibal has.

The goodbye he’ll have to say draws closer every day. Will can only hope he’ll be ready.

Before them, the building should be more ominous. It looks like every other corporate corner store Will has seen, glass sliding doors and signs proclaiming a 24-hour pharmacy. The exterior walls are the same, pale beige concrete they all share, a depressing sign of changing times that reminds Will of the time he spent in East Berlin, having ended up their by accident and unable to find a way to leave.

A tactical team is already climbing out of their van, something Will knows to be overkill. The man their looking for isn’t going to put up a fight. He’s far more likely to run and shoot someone, and the odds of any altercation are so slim Will could laugh. But, these things aren’t his decision to make, so as he comes to walk in step with Jack, he puts his hand on his holstered gun.

“She’s the eighth diabetic customer of the chain to disappear after filling an insulin prescription, second from this exact location,” Jack says.

“The other seven?”

“All over the county.” He pauses. “One pharmacist has been all over the county, too.”

“A floater,” Will agrees, the most positive use of the word he’s heard in years. So often the phrase invokes images of bloated, water-logged bodies and the uncontrollable stench of decay.

“Floater’s floating right here. Still logged into his work station.”

Will doesn’t ask how Jack could possibly know that as they head through the automatic doors. Officers are leading customers and cashiers out of the doors behind them, and Jack steps behind the pharmacy counter, holding his badge up for all the pharmacists to see.

“Everyone, stop what you’re doing and put your hands in the air.” They all listen, as if taking in the agents around them and choosing the path of least resistance. “I’m Special Agent Jack Crawford. Which one of you is Eldon Stammets?”

“What’s happening?” A person in the crowd asks.

“One of your customer didn’t go to work this morning after picking up a prescription filled by Mr. Stammets. We have reason to believe he abducted her."

“Eldon was just here,” a different person tells them. “Just now.”

And just like that, everyone fans out. The pharmacists are told to stay put, and Will follows Jack into the parking lot, while another agent yells a description of the car at him. When they finally find it, Will doesn’t hesitate, shoving the butt of his gun through the window and hoping his coat is thick enough to protect him as he reaches for the button to open the trunk.

Jack opens it as Will comes around, and a stench reaches their noses after just a moment, causing them all to recoil as they spot a trunk full of fertilizer. After he processes the situation, he begins shoveling dirt out of the trunk, praying the Stammets was stupid enough to leave his victim in his car while he was at work.

His hand hits something in the earth.

“She’s in here,” he says, and Will takes off his jacket to cover her the second he realizes that Gretchen Speck is naked in all of this dirt, unconscious with an oxygen mask over her mouth. There’s a hole in the armpit Hannibal has been nagging him about; his husband will be glad to hear that it’s life is over.

“The EMTs will be here in a second,” Jack tells him, offering his own coat to cover Speck’s lower half. As the paramedics swarm around the trunk,Will and Jack step back, leaving the situation in their hands. They’re quiet as each of them take in the scene, flashing lights and bustling people making for a strange sort of organized chaos.

“We know his name. We know where he lives. We have his car. We’ll have him in 24-hours.”

While Will is trying to form a reply, Price walks towards them, a look on his face that makes Will nervous.

“Jack. We just checked the browsing history at Stammets’ work station.”

“Do I want to hear about this?”

“No,” Price says. “And yes. But mostly no.”

Back inside, standing in front of the computer, Will is staring at a photo of himself, and he knows exactly who took it.

“It’s an article by Freddie Lounds. ’The FBI isn’t just hunting psychopaths, they’re head-hunting them, too,’” Beverly reads, “’offering competitive pay and benefits in the hopes of using one demented mind to catch an-” She shoots a look his way, and her suddenly stop leaves Will to wonder what he looks like, right now. What sort of face is he pulling that could possibly make her stop? “She goes into a lot of detail.”

“Son-of-a-bitch.”

Jack turns to Will, and it’s obvious they’re both thinking the same thing; Athena screwed them again.

“So, why isn’t Hannibal here?” Abigail asks. It’s a good question, one to which Will wishes he had a real answer. When they scheduled the meeting before visiting the pharmacy in their hunt for Eldon, Hannibal’s day was clear, and now, post-article, he’s suddenly busy, and Jack told him to take the day off from looking at case materials.

His husband and his father are meeting with Athena, Will suspects, but with no concrete proof, there’s little point in making accusations and causing a fuss. Still, Will hates it when Hades fights his battles for him, a fact of which the other man is well aware.

“He had a meeting with the landlord of his new office pop up unexpectedly, which takes precedent, apparently.”

“And why am I here?”

Because you’re going to live in this house, Will thinks but doesn’t say. It’s far too early for him to begin making plans revolving around Abigail, but that doesn’t mean he won’t.

“Hannibal wanted you to be his impartial set of eyes on the house,” Will tells her. “He’s well aware that our needs in a house are different, and he needed someone who’d be able to answer questions without bias.”

Abigail nods then, taking a sip of the latte Will bought her on the drive up. His own mocha is still sitting in the cup warmer, both of them bundled in the car as they wait for the realtor to

arrive.

“How many houses have you looked at?”

“Six, so far,” Will says. “I’m pretty picky, and so is Hannibal. I need something that’s not too pretentious, and he needs his home to feel high class, lest he get hives from shag carpeting.” Next to him in the car, Abigail laughs.

When the realtor pulls into the driveway and they both climb out of the car, Will takes his first real look at the house.

Red brick made up the front of the two story house, five tall, white windows with black shutters promising plenty of natural light. The lawn is brown, where grass sticks through the snow, but Will can imagine it in the summer, bright green everywhere except where the dogs dug holes to try and bury their toys.

The realtor introduces herself, but Will doesn’t pay much attention, shaking her hand and exchanging a few pleasantries.

“Dr. Lecter didn’t tell me that you two had a daughter,” she says as she shakes Abigail’s hand.

“The adoption papers haven’t quite gone through, yet,” Abigail says without missing a beat. “We had to fight for a few years before my biological father was willing to give up his parental rights.”

Just like that, Will is paying attention instead of trying to imagine himself living in this house. Abigail lied so quickly it almost seems to Will that she prepared it before the question was posed. How many different cover stories had she created?

“Well, with four bedrooms, there’s certainly plenty of room, if you two were hoping to adopt more,” the realtor says. She unlocks the door and heads inside, giving will just enough time to shoot Abigail a look.

“Her name is Natalie,” she whispers, answering a question he hadn’t thought to ask. The conversation about her lie will have to wait until later.

Standing inside the entryway, Will takes in the space. The ceiling is high, the trim white, and the walls cream. A stairway to the upper floor is right in front of them, the banister and the stairs the same medium-toned wood. Already, Will hates the paint colors, and he knows Hannibal will, too, but that problem can be simply overcome.

“The house was built in 1941,” Natalie tells them, “but for its age, the construction is very sturdy, and the appliances and utilities were all updated when the previous owners decided to sell the house.”

So they go on a tour of the house. From the dining room to the sun room, where Will can imagine Hannibal setting up shop with a book in his hand and the cat he’s always wanted curled up next to him.

Off the kitchen, the pantry is massive, and the great room would allow Hannibal to have a pretentious sitting room in the living room and a more casual space off the kitchen.

The upstairs is all bedrooms and bathrooms, almost certainly proving to be more space than they need, but the walk-in closet off the master bedroom would leave Hannibal more than enough room to fit his wardrobe in the same space as Will's, which is no small miracle.

In the second largest bedroom, Abigail walks around for a moment, examining the closet and the bathroom. The conversation she carries with Natalie play up the rouse, but as Will watches her eyes, he knows it's not all pretend. There's a very real part of her that's imagining living in the house, staying with them.

"This is the house," Will mutters, and Natalie turns to him, suddenly excited.

"You haven't even seen the basement," she says, but Will ignores the comment, still watching Abigail.

"I don't need to. I'll have to discuss it with my husband, but I'm sure we'll be calling you to put an offer on it in the next few days."

They go into the basement, walk around the rec room and look at the creepy looking storage rooms, but Will isn't paying attention to any of it. Already, he's planning paint colors and furniture, trying to find a compromise between his aesthetic and Hannibal's.

This will be their house.

All illusions are dropped as they sit around the table in Athena's kitchen. Her hair is resplendent, as are the robes she wears, and Hade's hair has defaulted to its natural state, hanging past his shoulders. In an attempt to rid himself for distractions, Hades has it curled on top of his head in a bun.

"I'm glad we've decided pageantry wasn't necessary this time," Athena says. "I do so love seeing my favorite uncle and my father."

"We all know Poseidon is your favorite uncle," Hades replies, keeping his voice as matter-of-fact as possible. To reveal the true extent of his rage would be to show his hand too early.

"None of that is the purview of this meeting, though," Zeus snaps.

"Of course. Carry on, explain how you're going to punish me for writing an article."

"You entered a federal crime scene without permission," Zeus points out.

"Escorted by a detective."

"Under false pretense."

Athena laughs, throwing her hair over her shoulder.

“He should have been more thorough. Still, it’s as good as permission.”

“You lied to a police officer.”

“Even if you could keep a god in prison, you can’t arrest me for lying.”

Hades watches Zeus think, can see the wheels in his small mind turning.

“You got all that from a local detective?”

They all know she didn’t. One of the worst kept secrets among the pantheon is Athena’s newfound desire to use her sexuality like a weapon, now that she’s a journalist, just as she would her lance in times of war.

The real question is who in the FBI she slept with to get her information, but Hades knows it’s likely they won’t find out the answer without giving something up.

“Lots of talk about your wife,” she says, turning to Hades. “Not to mention the rivalry of who gets the collar. A local detective looking for a pissing contest with the FBI might have some insight.”

“And evidently did,” Zeus replies, tone making it clear he doesn’t believe her for a second.

“Sure did.” Athena pauses then, a moment that would have the same level of gravitas if she were popping bubble gum. For all that she was the goddess of war, she was far less fearsome off the battlefield. “What is it about Persephone? She have a bit of seer in her? She secretly one of the fates?”

Zeus doesn’t answer her. Instead, he stands. Hades doesn’t follow suit; he follows no one.

“What do you want?” he asks. At this point, it seems to be the obvious question. People knew not to pester Persephone, lest they met his wrath. For Athena to take the risk, to publish an article she knew would make Persephone upset, whatever she wanted must be of great desire to her.

Hades was going to enjoy denying her it immensely.

“I heard that Demeter got a one time pass to make someone immortal. I think it’s only fair that I get in.”

Now he stands. Pushing his chair in as Zeus laughs, Hades holds up a hand to silence him.

“Absolutely not.”

“But-”

“Did you truly think this would work?” Hades asks. “Upsetting my wife was your best bargaining chip? We’ve needed you to create documents for us, and would likely have needed you to do so again in the future, and enraging me was your most elegant plan?”

For a moment, Athena seems like she's going to try and speak.

"You're going to leave Persephone alone," Hades says. "You'll leave Abigail and myself alone as well. And should you at some point need my abilities to make someone immortal, you will be welcome to grovel at my feet, but no will be my answer. I am not to be manipulated, nor did I marry a pawn in a poorly played game of chess." He pauses, turning to the door before. After a moment's thought, he looks over his shoulder at Athena.

"You have always overestimated your own abilities. It is perhaps you largest flaw, and it will be your downfall."

He walks out of the room, leaving the noiseless chasm of Athena's apartment behind him. Zeus catches up when he's halfway down the stairwell.

"You'll have to apologize at some point, you know," he says, and Hades shakes his head in reply.

"I don't deem her worthy of it."

They walk wordlessly to separate cars and climb in without sparing each other even a parting glance, let alone a goodbye. They drive back to their homes, return to the lives of Hannibal and Jack, leaving the moments they've spent in their natural forms behind.

"Your parents are worried about you," Bedelia tells her once all the niceties are exchanged. They sit again in her living room, the chairs moved around so they face each other, more conducive to the therapeutic environment Dr. du Maurier is fostering. Snow drifts down slowly outside, allowing Persephone to watch it instead of looking Bedelia in the eye.

"They always worry," she says. "I've learned to ignore them. For all that I've grown up, they still wish to treat me like a child."

"Perhaps there's reasoning behind their desire to keep you from Abigail, then," Bedelia replies. Persephone sits up straight, coming as close to meeting Bedelia's eyes as she's willing.

"That's what their problem is?" she asks. "Not with my reunion with Hannibal, but rather my willingness to give a child a home?"
Bedelia clicks her tongue.

"She's hardly a child, wouldn't you say?"

The reply sitting on the end of her tongue is offensive, so she holds it in despite its truth. While all mortals may be children to her, she's found no one is fond of hearing that. In her early days on Earth, when she no longer had the Underworld to which she could retreat, she angered hundreds of people this way.

"She may act older, put on a front, but she's still just a girl seeking her father's approval. There's growing up left to do."

“And will you give her that?”

Persephone shoots the other woman a look, trying to convey how thoroughly unimpressed with the question she is. Bedelia’s face remains blank, still waiting for a reply.

“Even as Will, I’m still a maternal figure,” she says. “I changed genders for convenience’s sake, not some deep-rooted desire to be someone else.”

“Why do you stay this way, then?”

“I have a life,” Persephone says. “I’ve been living it too long, I’ve grown to like it. To transition now would mean starting over, and I’m not willing to do that.”

They sit in silence, Bedelia jotting something down in the notebook open on her lap and Persephone staring out the window again, watching the snow pick up pace. The drive home could prove to be treacherous.

“I have a guest room, if the roads prove too harsh for you to drive,” Bedelia says, following her gaze and her train of thought. “I’m aware it’s not an ideal situation for either of us, but I won’t deny I fear your husband’s wrath, should something happen on your drive home.”

For a moment, she thinks about it. Watches the snow fall and tries to guess how quickly they’ll be able to clear the highways, but she’s so unfamiliar with the area, some of the calculations are impossible to make.

“I’ll turn around if things prove too difficult,” she promises. “But my husband and I have something we must discuss.”

“Mortal business, or something more immaculate?” Bedelia asks. It’s an idle question, one she obviously doesn’t expect a clear answer to, but the offer of a room surprised Persephone. She decides to return the kind gesture in kind.

“He has a terrible habit of trying to protect me when I don’t need him to. I have to go home and confront him, in an attempt to break it.” The knowing smile Bedelia gives her speaks of being underestimated countless times, and it endears her to Persephone. Enough so that as she grabs her coat, she returns it, even looking Bedelia in the eyes as she does.

Often, Bedelia thinks on the absurdity of her job. After decades of gifted work in the field of psychology, retiring with a long list of patients begging her to reconsider.

In a way, she did, even if none of her old patients will benefit from the work she’s doing now.

As is to be expected, when one becomes the therapist for gods.

It all started with Zeus and Hera. After centuries of fighting and infidelity plaguing their marriage, they sought counseling. She had no idea of their true identities, when they first came to see her, and if either one had tried to tell her, she would have laughed them out the door.

Yet here she sits, writing a few more notes of Persephone's file before standing to put it in her safe, moving the painting on the wall to she side to allow her access. While it's hardly a genius hiding spot, the painting itself is worthless. Bedelia made sure of it; in order for it to be an effective cover, she had to ensure no one might try to steal it.

After stowing Persephone's file safely with the others, Bedelia heads into the kitchen, grabbing the bottle of pinot noir she opened yesterday and pouring herself a glass. If she's going to watch the snow fall, she might as well do so in style.

With the glass in hand, she leans against the counter for a moment, debating her plans for the rest of the evening when a knock on the door stops her. It's only been a few minutes since Persephone left, too soon for her to have decided to roads were too icy. Could she have forgotten something? Had her phone fall out of her coat pocket?

Bedelia is lazy as she walks to the entry way, hand loose on her glass of wine. She doesn't set it down, when she opens the door.

Persephone is not standing on the other side.

"I followed Will Graham here," the man says. "He didn't get out of the car, though. A woman did. And I think you're going to tell me why that is."\

Her wine glass falls to the floor.

Troubles Yet to Come

Chapter Summary

Alana speaks with Abigail, Hannibal and Will cut their shopping trip short, and Bedelia entertains a rude guest.

Abigail knows too much, and she's not the only one.

Chapter Notes

sorry this took so long! I'd say life has been crazy, but honestly SAD is just the worst and now that spring is slowly coming to the midwest, I'm a bit like a flower peeking out of the ground to try and get some sunlight.

Title is from the song Weak by AJR, which has no relevance to this chapter but the lyric worked and I am tired.

Bacon is sizzling in a pan on the stove, the meaty smell wafting through the hall to him as he heads into the kitchen. Abigail sits on the island, telling Hannibal a story, and Hannibal is nodding and commenting at what seem to be all the right places.

“And then Melissa tried to call me, like she hadn’t talked to the news about how I must have helped my dad. She asked how I was doing, so I asked how her fifteen minutes of fame as the crazy girl’s ex-best friend were going.”

“The perfect reply,” Hannibal says, stirring eggs in another pan. For a moment, Will just leans in the doorway to take the scene. There’s a calm, familiar energy to the room. It’s a warmth that isn’t coming from the strong central heating, but from the beginning of something that feels like family. Will hasn’t always had Hades; for a long stretch of time before him, when it was just Persephone and her mother, she knew what loneliness was.

“She didn’t think so,” Abigail says, pausing only to take the small pancake Hannibal hands her and pop it in her mouth. “Melissa started screaming at me, told me I was a monster and a freak. So when she stopped to breathe, I told her to have a good day. I said it was lovely talking to her, and then I hung up the phone.” Will reveals himself, then, walking in the room and joining Hannibal in laughter.

“It’s amazing so much snark can fit in such a little body,” he tells her before kissing Hannibal on the cheek. “I feel left out of the breakfast club.”

“We knew you’d wake up eventually.” Jumping off the counter, Abigail leans down to pet the dogs as they jump around her, sitting on the floor with them and looking back up at him. “If all else fails, the dogs would bug you to let them outside. They’ve been wanting to explore the backyard all morning, and Hannibal won’t let them out because he doesn’t trust them off the leash.”

“That’s fair,” Will replies, reaching down to scratch Elizabeth behind the ears.

“It must be strange, going from the wide field with all her brothers and sisters to a small home with two new humans,” Hannibal says. And then he’s lost in cooking again, asking Abigail to set the table on the other side of the island. He hands her plates freshly unpacked from boxes, stored in the cabinets just the day before when they made a swift move. This morning is the first of many.

“We should probably go to Minnesota to get my things, soon,” Abigail says. “Not today, but within the next few weeks. Now that we won’t have to move it all again the next day.”

“Whenever all of us can get a day off, we will. It will be good for you to be able to put that chapter of your life behind you.”

Abigail rolls her eyes at Hannibal’s words, but she does come back from setting the table, already comfortable enough to come next to Hannibal and take over the pancakes while he drains the grease from the bacon.

So much of it could be acting alone, and Will acknowledges that. What he has provided, and Hannibal by extension, is a sense of security. In her ever changing world, Will can exist as a person with no expectations, someone to see her off into the next stage of life when her parents couldn’t. Bedelia has insisted on the first session they spoke about it that it wasn’t healthy, but tabled the subject when she saw it going nowhere. In all likelihood, Abigail will leave at the end of the summer, promise to write, and fade out of their lives. Will is preparing himself for that reality, all while hoping it doesn’t happen.

With nothing left for him to do, no place to slot himself in the kitchen, Will clicks his tongue. Winston and Elizabeth to follow him downstairs, though the rec room and out onto the loggia. Hannibal may have been unwilling to let them out without a leash, but Will has no reservations.

Red brick arches let streams of light in, early morning sun only slightly dimmed by the clouds. The stone floor is cold against his feet, goosebumps rising on his arms. Instantly, Will wishes he brought a coat, watching the dogs walk around in the frozen grass, nosing at the snow and rolling around, both of them delighting in the same chill he’s bemoaning.

After letting them loll around for another minute, Will clicks his tongue again, and they follow him inside, reluctantly letting him wipe their feet and dry off the quickly melting snow in their coats. If the dogs were to be allowed on the furniture, they couldn’t be allowed to track mud into the house; it was one of Hannibal’s many rules.

Back upstairs, Hannibal and Abigail are already eating. Will laughs quietly to himself, confident that if Abigail had been the one to take the dogs outside, they would have waited

for her before eating.

“So, Abigail,” Hannibal says as Will makes his plate and sits down, “Will and I have to go downtown to take care of a few details about the house, and we’ll be shopping afterward, to choose a few pieces of furniture we didn’t need previously and stock up on necessary groceries to have in the pantry.”

Will jumps in.

“It will be incredibly boring.”

Hannibal glares at him.

“And though it won’t be a particularly interesting trip, you’re welcome to come along.”

With a laugh, Abigail tucks a strand of hair behind her ear and shakes her head.

“As much as I appreciate your thoughtful offer, I think I’ll decline,” she says, looking at Hannibal. “I’m almost done with one of the books I stole from your office, and I think I’ll stay home and finish it.”

Only nodding in reply, Hannibal returns to his food, and Abigail turns to him.

“Alana called me earlier to ask if she could come by and talk to me, to see how I’m doing. I might take the dogs for a walk after that, to try and figure out the neighborhood.”

“They’d love the exercise,” he says. “Just be sure to keep your phone on you, in case Hannibal needs to call about how much anise or saffron he has.”

Abigail laughs, and in all of it, Will almost doesn’t notice that Abigail hasn’t touched her bacon.

Sitting in the half-furnished living room of the new house, Abigail looks Alana over. After her father was killed, Alana was the first person she met in Baltimore. In the unlikely event of an emergency, if she was unable to contact Will or Hannibal, Alana was the next person on her phone tree.

Now, the stark difference between Alana and the other two becomes clearer. There’s a part of Alana constantly on edge. Abigail doesn’t think it’s paranoid; she remembers how her father acted in the last weeks of his life. If anything, it reminds Abigail of her mother, who knew something but found herself unable to say anything, to call the police and right her father’s wrongs.

“How are you settling in?” Alana asks. It’s an entirely innocuous question that sends shivers up her spine. “It must be strange, leaving your home behind and living with two complete strangers.”

Hannibal's comment about the dogs at breakfast comes back to her, then. It seems so specific a phrase to be repeated; maybe it was a psychiatric phrase?

"I like it," she says, choosing to leave that thought alone. "Will and Hannibal are nice. I can tell they don't pity me, and I appreciate that."

"I've never known Hannibal to pity anyone," Alana says with a laugh.

"How long have you and Hannibal known each other?"

"Ages, it feels like. He was my mentor in medical school. As a doctor of psychiatry, and not psychology, I had to go through all of that."

"That's what I want to do," Abigail tells her, trying to sound nonchalant. "I didn't bring any of my own books, so I've been reading through Hannibal's, and they've only made me more certain.

"Hannibal is the perfect person to know, then," Alana says. She pauses, taking her own look around the room. Whatever she's looking for, she obviously doesn't find it, and her eyes come back to meet Abigail's gaze. "How long have you wanted to study psychology?"

Lying is a tempting option. Legally, there's no obligation for her to be honest. This is just a casual meeting that has nothing to do with her potential innocence or guilt. If Alana was called to testify in a theoretical trial, Abigail's only saving grace would be if Alana had a terrible memory.

This doesn't strike her to be the case, so she leaves out her father from the story of how she chose her career path.

"Because I was on the path to graduate early, and my parents didn't want me to, I had to take elective courses, along with the college classes I was enrolled in online. Eventually, when I ran out of course I wanted to take, I used psychology to fill my schedule. I liked the idea of being able to explain human behavior." Abigail turns, staring out the window into the backyard. From another room, Winston comes to curl up by her feet. "Now, I just want to help people."

"People like your father?" Alana asks. Abigail shrugs, not answering, and Alana takes that as a symbol to move on. "Well, Yale has an excellent psychology department. Hannibal and I have a few colleagues working there on research grants; I'm sure if you show the aptitude, Hannibal would recommend you to them."

Sitting uncomfortably in her chair, Abigail watches a flock of birds fly by the window. Weeks before Christmas, most birds have left for warmer weather, only pigeons, blue jays and woodpeckers having hung back. She wonders if Will and Hannibal's trip downtown was a ruse so they could try and find an appropriate present for her, and if so, how much success they've had. As if giving her a room in their home wasn't enough. She wonders if she is a bird that will migrate or one who will set down roots. Will she come back in the summer? Would Will and Hannibal even want her to?

Another thought she'll worry about later.

"I would hate for nepotism to be the secret to my success," Abigail tells Alana.

"It's hardly nepotism if you aren't related to them."

"Aren't I?"

A look crosses over Alana's face, sour and bitter.

"I live in their house, and they've mentioned no time line on when they wish for me to leave. We'll be flying to get my things, ship them here instead of to Yale. Blood isn't the only thing that makes people related, and even then, there's blood between us." It may be her father's blood, but it bleeds all the same.

Alana seems to read between the lines.

"Do you feel indebted to Hannibal and Will?" she asks. It's a stupid question, so Abigail laughs at it.

"It's hard not to," she says. "But certainly they haven't encouraged that belief, if that's what you're trying to ask. They aren't holding me against my will or bribing me to stay."

"That's not what I meant," Alana says. "I just don't want to you feel like you have to stay here, if you don't want to. I'm sure now that time has passed, your family back home would welcome you. And if not, there are always other options."

"I don't need other options," Abigail tells her, trying to convey finality in her words.

Silence fills the room then, each of them sitting with their own thoughts as much as they are the other.

How much does Alana suspect, she wonders. Does she fall in line with Jack Crawford, suspicious of her motives and ready to condemn her? Or has she chosen to see Abigail as just another victim of her father's crimes, made an orphan by the actions of a madman she happens to be related to? There's no subtle way to ask such a thing without raising alarms, really. What girl who just lost their parents is supposed to be disconnected enough to look at all the pieces on the chess board?To see herself as more than just a pawn already shows a level of composure most teenage girls don't have. Her traumas have changed her, just as they change everyone else.

"You said you didn't bring any books?" Alana asks, and Abigail nods. "Well, maybe we should run by a book store, then. As thrilled as I'm sure your professors will be about the advanced reading you've been doing, it's important to read for fun, too."

"Rereading the Harry Potter series sounds great," Abigail admits.

“Patient files are confidential,” Bedelia says. With shaking words and knees, she takes a step back, the cool glass of wine in her hands serving as her only anchor. “Even if I wanted to release them to you, I would be unable to. I would lose my license.”

“My gun doesn’t care about your license,” the man says. “My name is Eldon Stammets. You may have heard of me?”

In her kitchen, yesterday’s paper sits on the breakfast bar where she left it, the crossword finished and the sudoku abandoned when she found it too difficult. While waiting for the quiche she’d prepared last night to cook in the oven, Bedelia had flipped through a few of the articles, ignoring the sports and politics sections entirely. Right there, on the front page of the crime section, was a photo of Zeus and Persephone in front of a pharmacy. Persephone held an unconscious woman, and it was placed next to a mugshot of the man in front of her, holding a gun in her direction.

The FBI set up a tip line, asking for any sightings of a man they claimed to be armed and dangerous. But before their session, Persephone scoffed at the idea of Stammets as a danger. More likely to jump off a cliff than shoot someone, she said.

Now, Bedelia can only hope Persephone is right. Her life depends on a casual analysis made to her by a goddess who has no need to fear death. It is an impossibility for Persephone, something which never crosses her mind, never troubles her and keeps her awake at night while she lies in bed next to Hades.
Stammets stares at her, still waiting for an answer.

“I’m sorry,” Bedelia says. “My last patient requested an emergency appointment. I don’t normally see patients in my home; all my files are at my office.”

A bang rings through the room as heat pierces her leg. As she falls to the ground, her wine glass slips from her hand. It shatters on the floor around her and shards dig into her skin, more pain igniting from different corners of her body when she finally lands sprawled on the ground. Her head hits the tile of the entryway, her vision blurring. Eldon Stammets moves to stand over her, his face an impressionist painting.

“You have been terrified to leave your house since you were attacked by a patient at your old office. The real estate agent you leased through has an incredibly chatty secretary who was all too willing to tell me the story, when I inquired how I might find you to deliver the news that your estrange father had died and left you a large sum of money.” Her field of view clearing slowly, Bedelia can just make out the wicked smile on his face as he looms above her. “My voice is nondescript and nonthreatening. I sound as meek as I look; it all makes me a more effective predator. And more than anything, I hate liars.”

Picking her up under the arms jostles her wounds, but the pain is damped by adrenal response. How long it will last is unknown, and Bedelia can only hope this will be over before the effect wears off. It will be easiest to call for help with her mind lucid. He drags her into her living room, sets her carelessly on her own couch, quickly ruined with her own blood, and crouches in front of her.

“Now, where are the files?”

With arms and resolve weak, Bedelia points at the painting above her fireplace.

“Safe,” she mutters. The amount of blood she’s lost is unknown, but her hands and feet are starting to feel cold, an ill omen. “Combination is 11-13-99.” The birth date of Vera Caspary, who wrote the novel after which she was named.

Sitting there, her lucidity slipping away from her at every second, this feels incredibly relevant. Bedelia ponders all of this while hearing the painting land on the floor, splintering the cheap wood frame, the metallic shriek of the old safe door opening, and the shuffling of manila folders.

“None of these are labeled Will Graham,” Stammets barks, slamming the safe door with the stack still in hand. “Where is Will Graham’s file!”

“Persephone,” she muses, letting her head loll to the side. “Her name is Persephone.”

“Like the Greek goddess, the one married to Hades?”

She nods.

“Exactly.” A pause. “His file is in there, as well. Right before Hera’s.”

Though her vision is still hazy, she can hear Eldon make a quick movement. He grabs her face, and she can see his shocked expression.

“Are you trying to tell me that Will Graham is some sort of god?”

With a laugh, Bedelia leans into the hold, using it to keep herself upright.

“Goddess,” she corrects. “They live among us as normal humans, but they’re nothing like us. Abigail has no idea what she’s dealing with, the poor girl.”

“Abigail Hobbs, the girl who helped the shrike? How does she fit into all of this?”

“She’s living with them,” she says. Some part of her mind knows she’s said too much, but she can’t stop talking. For so long, she’s been unable to tell anyone, and now that the secret is out, the urge to share overtakes her. “At their new house in Alexandria. Hades won’t accept it yet, but they’ll adopt her before she leaves for college. She acts just like them.”

Eldon drops her head, then, letting Bedelia fall to the floor. Good, she thinks, it will be easier to crawl to her phone this way. The idea of calling for help is the only clear thought in her mind, at this point. Every other process in her brain is operating on instinct, each of her answers honest because there was no spare brain power to create lies.

“Will Graham needs to connect with Abigail, then,” Stammets says as he walks away from her, and as he leaves the room, Bedelia starts crawling.

Her injured leg is useless, dragging behind as she tries to ignore the glass digging into her skin and simply keep moving. Her home phone in on a table in the kitchen, where it feels like

just moments ago, she had been content and prepared for a quiet night in her own home, alone just as she preferred.

Each second she fights to move forward begins to feel like an eternity, dragging on slowly like sand falling through an hour glass, but the only way Bedelia can fall is onto the ground, collapsing and relinquishing her life. She refuses to be under Hades' power in such a way, refuses to surrender herself into his kingdom and lose this fight.

Hands scrape over tile, and for a moment she looses purchase, but still she inches on, until the low table her home phone sits on it right in front of her. Unable to stand, Bedelia pulls the table toward herself, toppling everything resting on it to the ground and putting the phone right in her reach.

Hades is on speed dial number three. Since he killed the patient who attacked her, she has always trusted him, if not to treat her with kindness, than at least to allow no one else the pleasure of killing her.

The phone rings only a moment before he picks up.

"Hello-" he begins, but in a moment of desperate rudeness, Bedelia cuts him off.

"Stammets was here. I'm gravely wounded, and he's heading for Abigail." With her last energy, Bedelia keeps her voice steady. Now was hardly the time to show weakness, with her own blood sprawled against the carpet in her living room on a path to where she now lays.

"Why would you not call 911 first?"

"He knows who you are, Hades. He saw Will get into a car and then watched Persephone leave it."

Part of the reason she's able to speak clearly is the adrenaline that kept her groggy and painless is wearing away, now when the only danger is not being shot in the head, but instead bleeding out. Her injured leg feels entirely numb.

"So yet again I must kill someone," Hades muses. "Or rather, I must come to your aid, and my wife must kill someone."

If Hades says anything more, Bedelia doesn't hear it. The phone slips from her grasp and her head falls onto the leg of the table she was using to prop herself up, her breathing shallow and her heartbeat sluggish.

Two black and white signs proclaim the stores name in the window displays, their block lettering reading "BOOK BANK" in large letters and "USED BOOKS" in smaller ones below. The displays themselves are cluttered with books, and a table sitting right outside offers a selection of titles for a dollar, with tax included.
Alana has only been to this The Book Bank a few times before, each while desperately searching for a present that might please one of her more particular colleagues. When all of

ones friends are pretentious, one must handle pretentious tastes, but she still thinks Abigail will find the store charming. Given that she lives almost down the street from the store, Alana imagines the girl will visit frequently.

A bell above the door rings as they both enter the store, Abigail leading the way. Watching her head to a section labeled young adult fiction, Alana stands back, taking a moment to breathe in the smell of well-loved, yellowed paper and bookbinding glue. There are many things she misses about the past, but being able to walk into a book store and have no one question her ability to read will never lose it's wonder.

"Hello!" A woman behind the counter says, smiling at Alana. "Is there anything I can help you find today?"

"Just looking," Abigail says, looking over her shoulder. "We just moved, and my books still need to be unpacked, which is a perfect excuse to by something new."

It's hard not to notice the implications Abigail makes, as if Alana has just moved as well, painting them to be mother and daughter. The resemblance is there, in dark hair and bright blue eyes, high cheek bones and a thin figure, but Alana already has a daughter.

Still, it would be awkward to make the correction. Alana lets the lie persist, and wonders how many other lies Abigail has told, for the act to be so casual.

"I absolutely agree," the woman says, running a hand through cropped brown hair. "My name is Emily, let me know if you need anything."

With an idle nod, Abigail vanishes behind a shelf, already lost in the piles of books surrounding her, and Emily turns back to Alana.

"Where did you move from?" she asks. Internally, Alana groans. At her age, making idle conversation is second nature, but that doesn't mean she's fond of it.

"Minnesota," Alana replies politely. It's the closest to the truth she can get, and with that, Alana heads into the back of the store to try and find Abigail and save herself from the awkwardness of the situation in which she's found herself.

She's leaning against a shelf, flipping through a book idly, her eyes glancing over the words. Alana adjusts her purse on her shoulder and tucks her hair behind her ear.

"Are we just lying to everyone, now?" she asks, keeping her voice low.

"I didn't lie. I just told the truth and she made her own assumptions."

"We didn't just move."

"Of course we did. Hannibal, Will, and I. That's a we." Alana glares. "It's not a big deal."

"In the future, leave me out of your half truths, then," she says, walking away and leaving the Abigail to browse. They'll head back to the house as soon as she's done, and Alana will go

home, drink a bottle of wine, and wonder just how may secrets Abigail has already buried inside her, and how many more she'll have with Hades and Persephone.

The tables are teal, the vinyl seats are red, and the windows are large with dusty, old blinds. The whitewashed walls let in the winter air with the heat running at full blast, and their waitress has short pink hair and an apron covered in pumpkins and bats despite Christmas just around the corner.

Hannibal is sitting across from him in the booth, looking entirely out of place. He's not wearing a suit, but he doesn't have to be; his husband has always carried himself with grace, worn eloquence on his shoulders like a cloak and wrapped himself in it. In this diner, hidden in the corner, Hannibal looks like he's sitting at another restaurant. His hands hold the plastic cup, but Will can fill in the image with a glass of wine and find a more reasonable image.

"I still think a fishing rod would be a great gift," he says, taking another sip of his coffee. In the car, shopping bags wait in the truck, various presents they'll wrap at home and hand off to people, celebrating a holiday they're both aware lacks any reality. Persephone remembers Jesus, walked the streets of Jerusalem at the same time as him, met him once in a marketplace, shook his hand and felt something about him that made her wonder. But he was born in the summer, not the winter.

"Absolutely not." The annoyed look Hannibal shoots him is softened by a smile that Will returns, reaching his hand across the table and letting their fingers tangle together.

"Because a scarf and a sweater are so much better."

"The colors will compliment her skin well," Hannibal says, as if this is the only thing that matters. "It's too cold to fish, and I doubt a 17-year-old has any interest in going ice fishing with you."

"You can't ice fish with a fly fishing reel." But Will lets that particular subject go. Trying to explain the difference to Hannibal would be a moot point. "Still, I'm sure she'll love the books. Just as I'd love to know what Athena wanted from you."

To see how Hannibal's shoulders tense, Will has to be watching for it, staring at his face and listening to his breath for the hitch. They sit in silence, then, and Will doesn't complain. Hannibal knows he's been caught, and that it would be pointless to lie, and a minute to collect his thoughts is the least Will can grant him. So Will flags down the waitress and asks for a refill of his coffee, ignoring that Hannibal is almost entirely out of water in a brief, weak moment of pettiness.

"I understand that you're disappointed I couldn't be there when you saw the house," Hannibal says, his voice slow and level. Will barks out a laughter, can see in his peripheral as tables nearby turn to look at him.

"It has nothing to do with that, but you knew that already."

“Then enlighten me.”

“I shouldn’t have to.”

“Forgive me if two thousand years allowed me to forget party of the laundry list of things you find annoying, dear.”

The conversation pauses as their waitress comes back. Will thanks her and she promises their food should be out shortly in reply.

“When will you stop fighting my battles for me?”

“This wasn’t your battle.”

“Athena publishes an article about me, and this isn’t my battle?” Will’s voice is beginning to raise, and after a wince, he lowers his volume. “Perhaps it’s you who should enlighten me, then, and answer my damn question. What did Athena want?”

“You weren’t the only one to make a deal with Demeter,” Hannibal says cryptically. “You were to work with Jack, and I was to allow her the right to make one person immortal. Anyone she might choose, free from my kingdom. Athena tried to use you as leverage so she might get the same deal.”

Will sighs.

“I’m sorry,” he says, setting his glasses on the table and running his hands over his face. “I’m just so tired of being a pawn in all of this. I assumed the worst of you when I had no reason to.” Looking up and settling his glasses back on the bridge of his nose, Will is glad that Hannibal has an amused smile on his face. “I’m assuming you put Athena in her place?”

“Of course.”

Discussion dwindles then, both of them getting lost in their own mind. Will is drawn to his stream, where he most often works out his problems, but the water can barely rush over his bare feet before their food is delivered. Eating requires just enough brain power that he has to stay present. He’ll have to dwell on all of this later.

They’re almost finished eating when Hannibal gets a phone call. Moments after answering, his shoulders tense, and even though Will can only hear Hannibal’s half of the conversation, his heartbeat begins to race. Something is wrong.

“So yet again I must kill someone for you,” he says. There’s a shake in his hand not holding the phone that doesn’t come through in his voice, a pretend level of calm. “Or rather, I must come to your aid, and my wife must kill someone.”

Will is already signaling the waitress, asking for the bill and pulling cash out of his wallet. Shrugging his coat onto his shoulders, he holds out his hand for the keys from Hannibal, who will no doubt teleport to wherever he needs to go.

“Abigail,” Hannibal bites. There’s no malice in his voice, only worry. “Stammets got to Bedelia, and he’s on his way to Abigail.” Standing, Will is on the move, but Hannibal puts a hand on his shoulder. “Darling, he knows. He can’t survive, and he can’t get to Abigail.”

Heart skipping a beat, Will nods and heads out the door, leaving Hannibal to handle anything he’s forgotten. Jumping in the car, he doesn’t bother with the seatbelt, throwing the keys into the ignition and grinding the clutch in his haste to pull out of the parking lot.

Through the traffic, Will is cursing, one hand on the wheel and another on his phone, trying to call Abigail, but every attempt goes straight to voicemail, her soft voice asking him to leave a message. Eventually, he throws it into the backseat, weaving between cars until he pulls into the driveway.

An unfamiliar car is parked on the street, the driver’s side door hanging open, and Will runs.

“Will? Hannibal?”

Her voice echos through the house louder than the sound of the door opening. Abigail’s surprised they’re home so soon; this morning, Will made it sound like their shopping would take all day, and Hannibal left her money to order food, just in case.

As she walks to the stairs, one headphone hanging out of her ear, Winston and Elizabeth are barking, just like they always do when Will gets home. There’s a different tone to it, though, less joyful, more territorial. She laughs quietly. The dogs have taken to her perfectly, Will told her, but they’re still getting used to Hannibal.

“Hello?” she says again, wondering if her mind was just playing tricks on her. Had she really heard the door open? Couldn’t the dogs just be barking because they wanted to go outside? The front door is closed, she can see that much from her position at the top of the stairs. Elizabeth’s is wagging in the kitchen, the barking having subsided, and Abigail heads towards her, steps slow. Even if she’s losing her mind, she’s taking precautions. “If you’re trying to scare me, Will, it won’t work.”

A man steps into the doorway, then, a gun hanging loosely in his let hand, his right hand held down at his side so Winston can continue smelling it.

“I don’t need to scare you, Abigail. I need to educate you.”

For a moment, she stands there, her brain trying desperately to process the situation. The strange man takes a step forward, and Abigail bolts, racing up the stairs.
Standing in her room, the door locked, Abigail doesn’t know how long she has. If the intruder decided to take his time, searching through the house she could have minutes to prepare, but if he’d come running after her, there might be only mere seconds.

Somewhere in the house is Will’s service weapon, no doubt locked away, but Abigail wishes desperately she had access to it. The feeling of familiar steel under her hands would be a comfort.

Instead, she shuffles through boxes of unpacked belongings, searching desperately for the knife her father gave her, something she almost hadn't decided to pack in her suitcase to bring to Baltimore. If she hadn't, Abigail would have been locked in her room, forced to improvise a weapon against a home intruder.

For the first time in weeks, months, Abigail thanks her father, thanks her sentimental nature.

With careful, quiet steps, Abigail walks toward her door and unlocks it, hiding behind her chest of drawers right next to it. When the man walks into her room, he'll head to the bathroom or the closet, convinced that she's hiding, and she can strike.

Minutes pass with her heart beating in her throat, a rapid pace she tries to calm with deep breaths Panic will get her nowhere, she knows. Just like when she first began hunting with her father, calm will be her savior. Will keep her hands from shaking and her knees from buckling.

The handle turns slowly, door creaking open on its ancient hinges. In an instant, Abigail is holding her breath.

"I know you're in here," the man says. "Smart of you to run away and regroup. I certainly can't blame you for the instinct. After all, there must be a reason they chose you."

Abigail should strike. This is her opportunity; his back is to her and she can see the safety of his gun is still on. She would be on him faster than he could even try to shoot her. But curiosity and fear keep her in place. What does he mean, they chose her.

"I knew there was something special about Will Graham after reading Lounds' article on him and doing some research, but nothing could have prepared me for the truth. I wonder, have they even told you?" He hasn't moved, standing there as if hoping his words will get through to her, force her to come out and ask questions. The urge is there, but Abigail stays silent. "How strange it must be if they have, living with gods. Especially them. Hades and Persephone, a force to be reckoned with. Beauty, brains, power. Who would have guessed?"

Wheels in her mind are turning, trying to place his words in the realm of believability, but all she hears is the raving of a madman.

"And the woman they see, Bedelia? Someone like us who picks apart the problems of gods? The stories she has must be magnificent."

Slowly, Abigail stands. After a pause, she decides she's heard enough. Even if what he's telling her is true, she doesn't care. She knocks her knife against the wall, watching as the man turns in surprise.

"What's your name?" she asks, stepping closer. Now that she can look at him, she sees him shaking. Whatever courage he was pretending to have, it's faltering, like a predator turned prey, the hyena meeting the lion.

"Eldon Stammets," he tells her. "There's so much I could tell you."

“You’ve told me enough,” she says, and with one deep breath, she plunges her knife into his stomach, fighting through muscle as she pulls it up towards his sternum. She’s nicked and organ, ruined his meat, as her father would say, but that was the plan. Eldon Stammets, the man Will was hunting, her mind fills in, falls to the floor of her room, his blood staining her hands and spilling onto the floor. His arms and his jacket splay out, revealing two manila envelopes. After a moment of thought, Abigail grabs it, looking at the names on the tabs. One reads Hades, the other Persephone.

The door slams open downstairs, and Abigail panics again, shoving the folders under her mattress.

“Abigail?” comes Will’s voice, soon followed by the sound of footsteps coming up the stairs. “Abigail, are you here?”

“In my room,” she calls back, dropping the knife. “I’m okay, but this guy isn’t.”

Will slams her door open, though, taking one look at the man on the floor before helping Abigail up and pulling her into a hug.

“I’m glad your okay,” he tells her.

Questions are swirling through her mind, but before she can think to ask them, Will is calling Jack Crawford, asking for a crime scene team and demanding someone come remove the body from his house.

“Should I pretend to be in shock when everyone gets here?” she asks, and Will pauses for a moment, looking around at the scene before nodding.

“Yeah, shock should work. Keeps them from asking you too many questions, if nothing else.” They both stare at the body for a second before looking at each other. “Did he say anything important?”

Abigail shakes her head, thinking about the files.

“Just the ravings of a mad man,” she lies. “I wasn’t really listening.”

He walks into a nightmare. There is discomfort buried within in him, something that might best be described as worry. Has it been so long since he experience anxiety, used to the nature of immortality and all it’s wonders?

Hades has never know a fear of death. He treats it with reverence, but the end of life is his work. To guide the souls of those who’ve left Earth behind for a more permanent existence. Ironclad has his knowledge been that nothing could tear him from this world, so long as Zeus permitted him to stay. While mortals fret over the time they have left, he has no such concerns.

The same cannot be said for Bedelia. As he walks in through the front door, crunching against the glass lying broken on the floor and taking in the scene of blood and wreckage in

front of him. A path of destruction and debris is laid out clearly for him leading from the entryway into the kitchen, where he finds her played on the ground, her chest slowly rising and falling and her hand twitching, as if she's using the small movement to keep herself lucid. Her eyes stare off into the distance.

"I worried you might not come," she tells him with a weak voice. "That you might leave me to my fate, decide this was my price for sloppiness."

"Now, now," Hades says, leaning down next to her. "We both know you have not served your purpose entirely."

Despite the pain he knows she must be in, Bedelia lets out a laugh, bitter and curt.

"You and you plans," she mutters. "Always committed to them in fullness."

"A noncommittal plan is hardly a plan worth making."

Deciding his pants will have to be a loss, Hades bends onto his left knee, ripping Bedelia's hose around the knee to gain better access to her wound. Were he at a hospital, he would have no trouble stopping the bleeding. All the supplies might be laid out in front of him by a surgical aid, or even in a rush, he could arrange the supplies on his own.

But Bedelia's house was lacking in sutures and antiseptics, clamps and anesthesia. Though the bullet had gone straight through the flesh of the knee, leaving behind no bullet fragments he could see without probing deeper, the best he could do in their current situation was plug the wound.

"I'm afraid you won't like what I have to say next," he tells her, standing up to look around the room for a towel and using a piece of kitchen shears to cut a strip off. When he comes back and begins using his belt as a tourniquet and filling the bullet hole with the towel, her jaw is set in a hard line.

"In this situation, I imagine you're going to tell me anyway."

"I can do nothing for you here," he says. "But at the Baltimore house…" he says, letting his voice trail off and watching her face. Even through the pain, she manages to roll her eyes.

"If I have to make a visit to your murder basement to live, I will consider it the ultimate irony, but I shall do so."

Picking her up, Hannibal thinks of the room underneath his pantry, and in seconds, Bedelia's kitchen is empty.

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